



**MYSTERIOUS  
WORLD**

ARTHUR C CLARKE  
REVISITED PART TWO

TEXTING DEMONS SATAN'S MINIONS GET SMARTPHONE SAVVY

UNSETTLING TOYS A REHOMING SERVICE FOR CREEPY DOLLS

SUPERNATURAL SCOTT SIR WALTER VERSUS THE WITCHES

MONKEY RIOT • POSSESSED EXORCIST • WANDERING WALRUS • SCARY FAIRIES

**THE  
WORLD'S  
WEIRDEST  
NEWS**

THE WORLD OF

STRANGE PHENOMENA

WWW.FORTEANTIMES.COM

# ForteanTimes

## DUNE

UNCOVERING THE  
MYSTICAL ORIGINS  
OF FRANK HERBERT'S  
SF CLASSIC

FT411  
NOV 2021  
£4.80

### STRANGE STORIES FROM SCUNTHORPE

GHOSTLY MONKS AND  
PHANTOM JAYWALKERS

### THE RETURN OF THE KING

AN ELVIS PRESLEY  
SÉANCE IN WATFORD



# RUE MORCUE

## DIGITAL EDITION

"THE BEST DAMN MAGAZINE IN THE GENRE!"

GUILLERMO DEL TORO



ONLY  
\$6.66  
PER ISSUE

TRY OUR  
BRAND NEW APP  
WITH DAILY NEWS, REVIEWS,  
FEATURES AND LOTS MORE!

NEVER  
TRUST THE  
LIVING

GET IT ON IOS AND GOOGLE PLAY



RUE-MORCUE.COM



# CONTENTS



34 The mystical origins of Frank Herbert's *Dune*



4 Wally the wandering walrus



42 Arthur C Clarke's mysteries



16 Sir Walter Scott versus witchcraft

## FORTEAN TIMES 411

### Why fortean ?

Everything you always wanted to know about *Fortean Times* but were too paranoid to ask!

SEE PAGE 78

## STRANGE DAYS

A digest of the worldwide weird, including: wandering walrus, possessed exorcist, creepy toys, monkey riots and much more...

- |    |                    |    |                   |
|----|--------------------|----|-------------------|
| 12 | ARCHÆOLOGY         | 24 | ALIEN ZOO         |
| 14 | SCIENCE            | 28 | STRANGE CONTINENT |
| 22 | THE CONSPIRASPHERE | 32 | THE UFO FILES     |

## FEATURES

### 34 COVER STORY THE SHORTENING OF THE WAY

With a new *Dune* movie in cinemas and a TV series in the offing, **BOB RICKARD** dons his still-suit and probes the origin of Frank Herbert's protagonists – the *Kwisatz Haderech* – and their mysterious ability to transcend space and time.

### 42 REVISITING ARTHUR C CLARKE'S MYSTERIOUS WORLD, PART 2

**RYAN SHIRLOW** hits the rewind button and continues his episode-by-episode reappraisal of a fortean television classic.

### 48 SCARY STORIES FROM SCUNTHORPE

**ROB GANDY** heads to the steel town of Scunthorpe, where he finds that this centre of modern industry is a surprising hotspot for anomalous activity, well supplied with spectral presences, hospital apparitions and phantom jaywalkers...

## SERIES

54 BUILDING A FORTEAN LIBRARY  
Living On **THE HIEROPHANT'S APPRENTICE**

76 PECULIAR POSTCARDS  
If London were Venice **JAN BONDESON**

## FORUM

- 57 The Return of the King **KATE CHERRELL**  
58 "Time is no stream to get fixed in" **ERIC HOFFMAN**

## REGULARS

- |    |           |    |             |    |                |
|----|-----------|----|-------------|----|----------------|
| 02 | EDITORIAL | 71 | LETTERS     | 79 | PHENOMENOMIX   |
| 61 | REVIEWS   | 78 | READER INFO | 80 | STRANGE DEATHS |

## EDITOR

DAVID SUTTON  
drsutton@forteantimes.com

## FOUNDING EDITORS

BOB RICKARD (ft-bobrickard@mail.com)  
PAUL SIEVEKING (sieveking@forteantimes.com)

## NEWS EDITOR

IAN SIMMONS (simmons@forteantimes.com)

## ART DIRECTOR

ETIENNE GILFILLAN (etienne@forteantimes.com)

## BOOK REVIEWS EDITOR

DAVID V BARRETT (dvbarrett@forteantimes.com)

## EDITORIAL ASSISTANT

ABIGAIL MASON

## RESIDENT CARTOONIST

HUNT EMERSON

## PRODUCTION ASSISTANT

TRACEY KILLICK (tracey\_killick@dennis.co.uk)

## SUBSCRIPTION ENQUIRIES AND BACK ISSUES

www.managemymags.co.uk  
customer@subscribe.forteantimes.com

FORTEAN TIMES is produced for Fortean Times Holdings Ltd by  
WILD TALENTS LTD. Postal address: Fortean Times,  
PO BOX 1200, Whitstable CT1 9RH.

You can manage your existing subscription through  
www.managemymags.co.uk – this should be your first port  
of call if you have any queries about your subscription.

Change your address, renew your subscription  
or report problems: UK subscriptions: 0330 333 9492 / customer-  
care@subscribe.forteantimes.com

USA & Canada subscriptions: (+1) 800-428-3003 (toll free)

Fax (+1) 757-428-6253 email helpline@imsnews.com

Other overseas subscriptions: +44 (0)330 333 9492

## LICENSING & SYNDICATION

FORTEAN TIMES IS AVAILABLE FOR  
INTERNATIONAL LICENSING AND SYNDICATION

SENIOR GROUP LICENSING MANAGER

CARLOTTA SERANTONI TEL: +44 (0) 20 3890 3840

carlotta\_serantoni@dennis.co.uk

LICENSING CONTENT MANAGER

NICOLE CREASEY TEL: +44 (0) 20 3890 3998

nicole\_creasey@dennis.co.uk

FOREIGN SALES hello@marketforce.co.uk

## FT ON THE INTERNET

www.forteantimes.com / www.facebook.com/forteantimes

## PRINTED BY PRECISION COLOUR PRINTING

## DISTRIBUTION

Distributed in UK, Ireland and worldwide

by Marketforce (UK) Ltd, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London,  
E14 5HU. Tel: 02037879101.

Email: hello@marketforce.co.uk

Speciality store distribution by Worldwide Magazine

Distribution Ltd, Tel: 0121 788 3112 Fax: 0121 788 1272

## STANDARD SUBSCRIPTION RATES

12 issues: UK £48; Europe £58; Rest of world £68

US \$89.99 (\$161.98 for 24 issues)

## PUBLISHED BY FORTEAN TIMES HOLDINGS LTD.

Fortean Times, ISSN 0308-5899, is published every four weeks by  
Fortean Times Holdings Ltd.

The US annual subscription price is \$89.99. Airfreight and mailing in  
the USA by agent named WN Shipping USA, 156-15, 146th Avenue,  
2nd Floor, Jamaica, NY 11434, USA. Periodicals postage paid at  
Jamaica, NY 11434, USA.

**US POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to: Fortean Times, WN  
Shipping USA, 156-15, 146th Avenue, 2nd Floor, Jamaica, NY  
11434, USA. Air Business Ltd is acting as our mailing agent.



Member of the Audit Bureau of Circulations.  
ABC 14,368 (Jan-Dec 2019)

Printed in the UK. ISSN: 0308 5899

© Fortean Times Holdings Ltd: SEPTEMBER 2021



COVER ILLUSTRATION BY

PASCAL BLANCHÉ

WWW.PASCALBLANCHE.COM



Originally  
created for  
**LES VISIONS DE  
DUNE** (Vivien  
Lejeune).  
Reproduced  
with kind  
permission from  
THIRD EDITIONS

WWW.THIRDEDITIONS.COM

# EDITORIAL



CAPUCINE DESLOUIS



It's over half a century since Frank Herbert's SF epic *Dune* appeared in print and captured the imagination of readers around the world, many of whom will doubtless be looking forward to seeing Denis Villeneuve's new film adaptation this autumn. FT founding editor Bob Rickard counts himself among the hallowed ranks of *Dune* fandom, and in this issue he not only previews the new movie but digs deep into the book's surprising origins. While some of its ecological concerns – the

1960s 'dunification' of the Oregon coast was one of the issues that got Herbert thinking about desert planets – have a striking contemporary resonance, it was Herbert's research into some of the odder corners of the Abrahamic religions that Bob explores in his article (which, as eagle-eyed readers will spot, is also the next instalment in his ongoing study of mysterious teleportations). Judaism, Christianity and Islam each contain stories of prophets, saints or teachers making magical journeys in which the normal workings of time and space appeared to be suspended; whether these teleporting holy men were lifted by angelic beings, travelled in supernatural coaches or rode magical steeds, they all, as Bob demonstrates, find a futuristic counterpart in *Dune*'s Guild of Navigators and, crucially, in the figure of Paul Atreides, the messianic *Kwisatz Hederech*, or 'Shortener of the Way'.

Elsewhere in the issue, Rob Gandy continues his exploration of weird Lincolnshire, with some spooky stories from the unlikely sounding location of Scunthorpe, Ryan Shirlow dips into another batch of episodes from *Arthur C Clarke's Mysterious World* and Jan Bondeson presents a bizarre vision of what a semi-submerged London (complete with Venetian gondolas) might look like. We also examine two very different cases of artistic communications from beyond the grave: Eric Hoffman

tells the strange story of how Welsh poet Alun Lewis's post-mortem writings were channelled by a young London writer, and Kate Cherrell recalls a rather sorry attempt to summon the spirit of Elvis Presley to a séance in Watford – and release the results on an LP. All this plus the truth about the Vinland Map, a look at Sir Walter Scott's relationship with the supernatural and the summer odyssey of Wally the wandering walrus. Enjoy!

## ERRATA

408:30: In his 'Saucers of the Damned' column Nigel Watson mistakenly attributed a quote to Jack Shaeffer, but would like to clarify that it actually came from Jason Colavito.

409:2: The various sources for our report on the Chinese elephant trek all come from 2021, not 2012 as was stated in error.

410:23: Dean Carroll pointed out that in the caption to the 'Giant Bunny Theft' story we'd inadvertently called the world's oldest topless model 'Annette Winters'. Her correct name, as given in the article, is Annette Edwards.

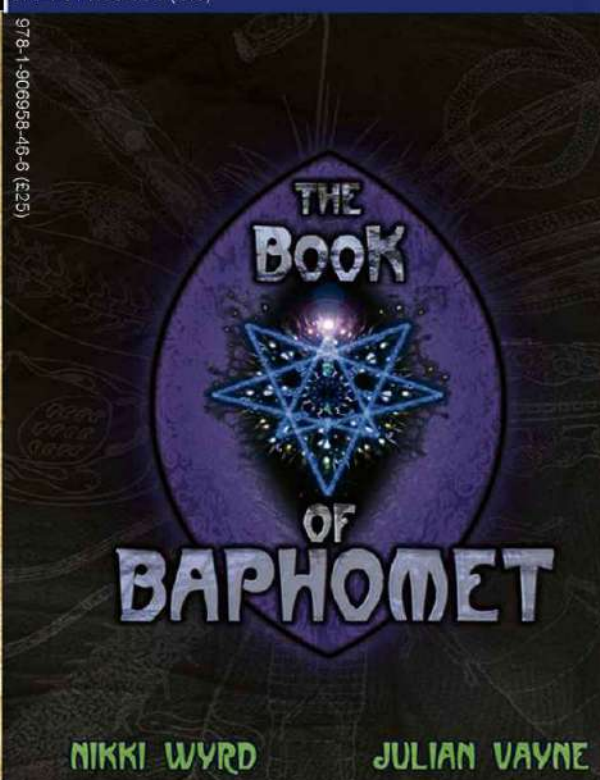
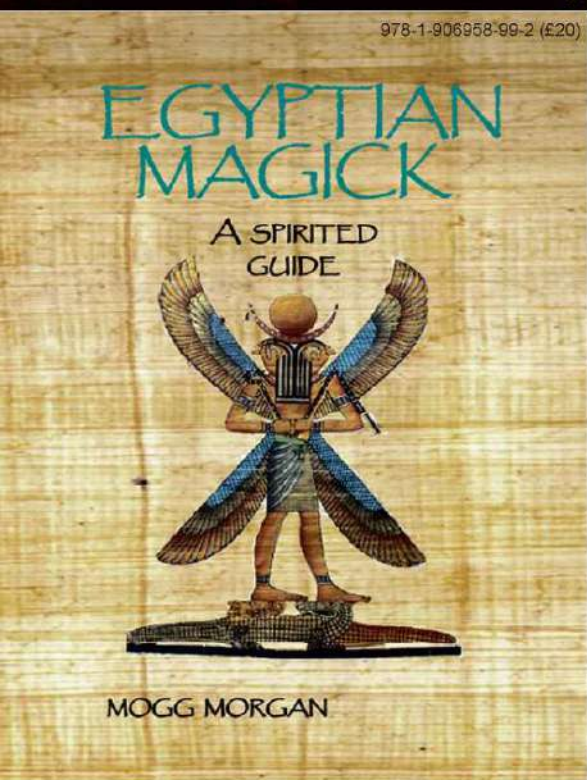
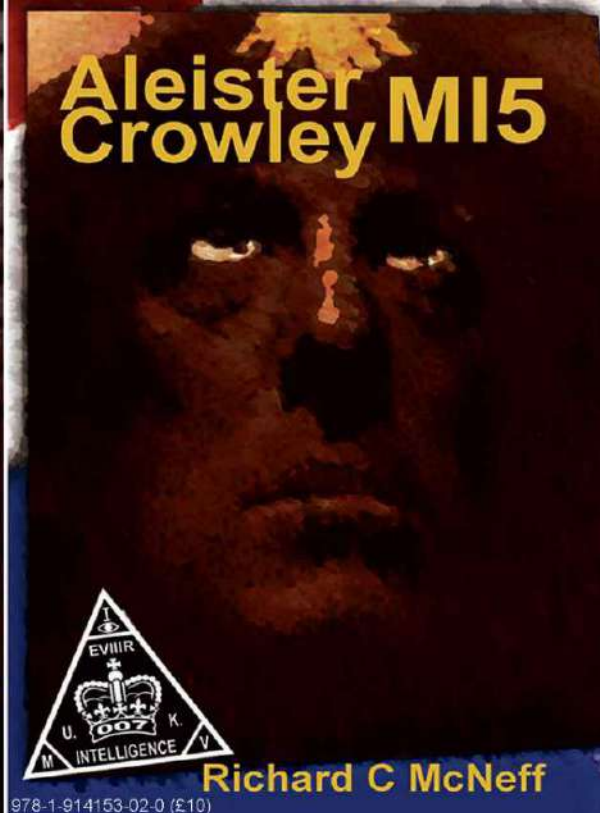


## NEW ADDRESS FOR FT NEWS CLIPPINGS

Please note that we now have a new address to which you should send your clippings. The old PO Box is now defunct, so email your stories to [news@forteantimes.com](mailto:news@forteantimes.com) and address your envelopes to:

FORTEAN TIMES, PO BOX 1200, WHITSTABLE, CT1 9RH.





MANDRAKE FORTEAN BOOKS  
mandrake.uk.net



# A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD STRANGE DAYS

## WHERE'S WALLY?

### Wandering walrus embarks on European summer tour, complete with merch

While China has been transfixed by the elephants trekking across Yunnan (FT407:4), Europe has spent the summer distracted by the antics of Wally the wandering walrus. Normally confined to the Arctic Circle, walruses do not usually venture as far south as the British Isles, but in mid-March one was spotted by Alan Houlihan and his daughter Muireann basking on Valentia Island, County Kerry, Ireland. “The size of the thing was astronomical. It was the size of a big bull,” said Houlihan. “He disappeared into the sea for a while, and he then came back and put himself on a rock for a good couple of hours. It was fantastic.” The next day, though, there was no sign of the creature, and Marine biologist Kevin Flannery of Dingle Oceanworld Aquarium told the *Irish Examiner*: “This is the first confirmed sighting of a walrus. It’s a one-off as far as I’m concerned.” There was speculation that the walrus had fallen asleep on an iceberg that had drifted south, or deliberately swum there in search of food. However, this was just the start of the walrus’s – soon to be dubbed “Wally” – European summer tour.

A few days later, on 20 March, he turned up across the Irish sea near Broad Haven South beach in Pembrokeshire, Wales, where Cleopatra Browne of Welsh Marine Life Rescue described him as “sat there, chilling”, while her colleague Terry Leadbetter said, prophetically: “Hopefully he is heading toward Cornwall. He’s been to Ireland and Wales.” Wally’s first stop, though, was Tenby, in southwest Wales, on 27 March, where he took up



*Tenby clearly suited Wally, as he remained in the area for weeks*

residence on the Lifeboat slipway, basking in the sun. Tenby clearly suited Wally, as he remained in the area for several weeks, at

above: Wally arrived in Tenby in March, nabbing a prime spot on the lifeboat slipway. LEFT AND BELOW: Wally-themed ale and mugs were soon in production.



one point being seen balancing a starfish on his nose. It was here that he began the activity for which he has become infamous – sinking a small boat by trying to climb aboard. The RNLI didn’t entirely appreciate him blocking their slipway either, with lifeboat crews trying all kinds of tactics to shift Wally, from blowing an air horn in his direction to spraying him with a hose. Eventually, they were able to “gently nudge” the walrus into the water.

By mid-May, he was on the move again; this time, he did indeed head for Cornwall, popping up beside a sea safari boat off Padstow before heading in the direction of Tintagel. He didn’t remain in Cornwall for long, turning up next at Sables-d’Olonne in France, 390 miles (628km) away, where he was slightly injured in a collision with a boat. This didn’t seem to slow him down, though, as the next day he turned up asleep in a boat in La Rochelle, 60 miles (96km) away. His wanderlust did not stop there; nine days later he was seen at the mouth of the River Nervion, near Bilbao in northern Spain, where he once again damaged a boat by climbing on it.

Having earned the record for the most southerly sighting of a walrus, Wally finally turned north again, and by the end of June he was in the Scilly Isles, where he took up residence in St Mary’s Harbour for an extended period, to the initial delight of the locals. This soon turned to frustration after Wally damaged or sank several boats by trying to climb on them, and steps were taken to try and entice him away. When these were unsuccessful a special pontoon was built to allow him to lounge safely and let the locals get on with their business. Predictably, almost as soon as this had been built, Wally took off on his travels again, leaving Scilly in early August for what experts hoped would finally be a journey home. He was, though, heading back to Ireland, being spotted off Waterford before ending up in Cork harbour by the middle of the month, where he resumed his boat-sinking activities. A group of people dressed in *Where’s Wally?* costumes attempted to lure him onto a new pontoon, but he chose, instead, to take up residence on a boat belonging





## DISTANT COUSINS

Ancient humans and Neanderthal art

PAGE 12



## FAREWELL MAGAWA

Retirement beckons for the Hero Rat

PAGE 26



## SONG OF ICE AND FIRE

Extreme weather events across Europe

PAGE 28



ABOVE: In August, Wally decided to move to Cork harbour, where he took up residence in a boat belonging to Clonakilty Distillery.

to Clonakilty Distillery. And there he remains for the time being. So far, he has swum at least 1,700 miles (2,800km) to get to Ireland from Greenland, plus a further 2,500 miles (4,000km) to tour Europe – a record voyage for a walrus – and he shows no sign of heading home.

While Wally probably headed south to feed, polar bear researcher Ian Stirling and colleagues have come up with what could be another compelling reason. After seeing a polar bear use tools to reach a hanging chunk of meat in a Japanese zoo, he collated reports from Inuit hunters relating to tool use by polar bears. One of the most persistent behaviours reported was of bears killing walruses by bashing them on the head with large stones or chunks of ice. Long dismissed as a myth by Western researchers, alongside reports of shapeshifting bears, Stirling now believes that these Inuit reports of tool use are true. “Really, the only species you would want to bonk on the head with a piece of ice would be a walrus,” agrees Andrew Derocher, director of the Polar Bear Science Lab at the University of Alberta in Edmonton, Canada. *BBC News*, 15+20 Mar; 20 May; 2+13 July; *Live Science*, 25 May; *ITV News*, 28 May; 19 Aug; *Science News*, 29 July 2021.

## RADIOACTIVE TERROR PIGS

In a study of how the partial meltdown of the Fukushima nuclear reactor in 2011 had affected local wildlife, published in the journal *Proceedings of the Royal Society B*, researchers reported a surprising discovery. As expected, animals and plants from the surrounding area moved in and started to recolonise the radioactive area vacated by humans; less expected was how the local wild boar had taken advantage of the situation. The Japanese Boar (*Sus scrofa leucomystax*, also known as the White-Moustached Pig) had taken over the entire district and in the initial 20km exclusion zone around the reactor, where the radiation is highest, they had

also extensively cross-bred with domestic pigs left behind by fleeing humans. This produced a sturdy new boar-pig hybrid contaminated with up to 300 times the safe human dosage of the lethal isotope caesium-137 without showing any mutations. These radioactive hybrids have become cocky and aggressive, losing their usual wariness of people. They now make up 10 per cent of the local boar population and are proving unwilling to cede territory to the humans now returning to the exclusion zone, standing their ground and attacking people, forcing the authorities to send in heavily-armed hunters to flush out and cull the dangerous crossbreeds. *theregister.com*, 1 July 2021.



## EXTRA! EXTRA!



FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

### CYCLIST HAD TO BREAK

Kentish Gazette, –1982.

### Flying squirrel dealers busted

Toronto Star, 25 Oct 2020.

### MAN THREATENED TO EAT THREE PEOPLE AT NAIRN BUS STATION

Aberdeen Press & Journal, 12 Aug 2021.

### Man who bit officer 'has suffered enough'

Hull Daily Mail, 12 Aug 2021.

### AN EXISTENTIAL THREAT TO WHOLE OF SOUTHEND

Leigh Times, 27 July 2021.

### Giraffe families look up to their wise grandmothers

Guardian, 4 Aug 2021.

THE ASIAN SHIMBUN VIA GETTY IMAGES



## SIDELINES...

### CHIMP AFFAIR

Management at Antwerp Zoo have intervened to break up a relationship between a female visitor and one of their male chimps as they feel he needs to concentrate on socialising with other chimps. Adie Timmermans has been making weekly visits to see Chita, a 38-year-old chimp, for four years. During her visits they blow kisses to each other and wave through the glass of the chimp enclosure. An emotional Ms Timmermans said: "The problem is I'm having an affair I'd say with a chimpanzee. I love that animal and he loves me." *metro.co.uk, 25 Aug 2021.*

### FAST FOOD

In a lawsuit filed in Russia, Orthodox Christian Ksenia Ovchinnikova is suing McDonalds because she claims their ads made her break her Lent fast. Because of her beliefs she is supposed to avoid meat, dairy, poultry, and meat by-products for Lent, but after a month of fasting she said: "I saw an advertising banner, I could not help myself. I visited McDonald's and bought a cheeseburger." Her lawsuit claims that McDonalds should not have advertised their meat and dairy products when Christians were trying to stay away from them and requests 1,000 roubles (£10) compensation for "moral damage". *bizarre.awm.com, 17 Aug 2021.*

### NO FARM

After spotting a Buick at a McDonald's drive-through in Marshfield, Wisconsin, with a cow in the back seat, Jessica Nelson posted a video of the sight to Facebook. The cow's owner saw the post and responded saying that he'd just bought the calf at auction and was taking it home, along with two others she hadn't seen that were lying on the floor. *boingboing.net, 30 Aug 2021.*



## THE VINLAND MAP

Controversial chart is finally revealed as a deliberate fake



ABOVE: The Vinland has sparked controversy ever since it first came to light in 1957. Has it now been definitively debunked?

Since it was made public in 1965, the Vinland map has been mired in controversy. It was claimed to be a 15th century map that shows the east coast of North America, drawn before Columbus discovered the continent and informed by Norse exploration; but despite high-profile endorsements, there have always been doubts as to whether it was genuine. Besides showing the American coast, the map shows Africa, Asia and Europe, as well as Greenland, and possibly Japan. The map first came to light in 1957, bound with a mediæval text called *Hystoria Tartarorum* (usually translated as *Tartar Relations*) when it was offered to the British Museum by two book dealers, Irving Davis and Enzo Ferrajoli de Ry. The museum declined to buy it, but de Ry then sold it for \$3,500 (£2,500) to an American dealer, Laurence C Witten II, who donated it to Yale University. Yale were suspicious of the map because wormholes in it did not match those in *Hystoria Tartarorum*, but Davis, via Witten, was later able to conveniently sell them (at \$300,000) another

### It shows the east coast of America informed by Norse exploration

mediæval manuscript, *Speculum Historiale* (Historical Mirror), that did have wormholes matching both the Vinland Map and *Hystoria Tartarorum*, demonstrating it had originally been bound at the front of that book, with *Hystoria Tartarorum* at the back. All former ownership marks had been removed from the manuscripts and Witten declined to provide any provenance, allegedly because of the previous owner's tax concerns. Yale's purchase of *Speculum Historiale* was funded by the philanthropist Paul Mellon, as long as the Vinland map could be authenticated. He required a scholarly book to be written to demonstrate the authenticity and for the map's existence to be kept secret until this was published. This book was duly written by two Yale scholars

and a British Museum curator and took some years, finally seeing the light in 1965, when the map was revealed to great fanfare the day before Columbus Day.

Immediately, academic reviewers called the map's authenticity into question, pointing out that it bore strong resemblance to another 15th century map that did not include America, that the way Greenland was depicted was suspiciously modern, while other, better-known places, such as Norway, were more consistent with mediæval maps. There was even evidence that the way the Vinland map was drawn took account of damage caused by folds in the map that it may have been derived from, while some of the text used anachronistic phrasing. None the less, the Vinland map was never conclusively demonstrated to be fraudulent, and its claim to represent lost Viking knowledge of America was bolstered by the later discovery of the Viking settlement at L'Anse aux Meadows in Newfoundland, Canada. Yale librarian Alice Prochaska commented in 2002 that: "We regard ourselves as





## SIDELINES...

### CARROT CHAOS

Carmel Sepuloni, a New Zealand cabinet minister, was conducting a live Zoom interview with Radio Samoa from her home when her son burst into the room shouting and excitedly brandishing an extremely phallic carrot he'd discovered in their groceries. After trying to grab the carrot she succeeded in getting her son to leave the room and completed the interview but afterwards said: "Note to self: I will never buy the odd shaped carrot pack again." *Guardian*, 30 Aug 2021.

### SWANSONG POSTPONED

Dennis Soyster, 32, credit manager for a carpet firm in Ellicott City, Maryland, was told by doctors in 1977 that he had a rare intestinal disease from which he would soon die. He embezzled \$29,000 to spend his last days in wild living. Having spent the money, he learnt that his 'disease' was an allergic response to the surgical gloves used in exploratory surgery. *Int. Herald Tribune*, 27 Aug 1979.

### MILD INCONVENIENCE

Tomoharu Nakamura of Sapporo, attempted to hold up a convenience store in Kiyota ward with a cigarette lighter. He entered the store, pointed the lighter at the manager and said: "Out with the money or I'll light you up!". Unimpressed, the manager retreated to a back room and called police, who Nakamura also ineffectually threatened with his lighter before being arrested. Japanese thieves have a track record of attempting hold-ups with odd weapons, including, in one case, nose hair clippers. *soranews.com*, 26 Aug 2021.

### PRIZE IDIOT

The International Olympic Committee has agreed to replace the gold medal belonging to softball pitcher Miu Goto after Takashi Kawamura, the mayor of Nagoya, Japan, bit it during a victory reception for the softball team, leaving teeth marks in the medal. Kawamura's behaviour led to over 7,000 complaints being made to the Nagoya government after which he apologised and agreed to forego 1.5million yen (£9,900) of his salary as a penance. *insider.com*, 25 Aug 2021.



### THE CIRCLE GAME

While crop circles are well past their early-90s peak as a phenomenon, they seem to be having a bit of a moment in 2021. New Zealand singer Lorde (right) announced her recent *Solar Power* album with



a video featuring the album's logo as a crop circle (left); it was in fact created in the UK at Walker's Plantation, near Broad Hinton, Wiltshire. Meanwhile, the video game phenomenon *Fortnite* has also been foreshadowing its next major iteration with a prominent in-game crop formation, which also had a physical manifestation at Uffcot, also in Wiltshire (right).

*Gamesradar.com*, 4 Jun 2021, *cropcircle-connector.com*, 15 Jun 2021.



the custodians of an extremely interesting and controversial document... and we watch the scholarly work on it with great interest."

Now, though, that scholarly work has come to a definitive and hard-to-refute conclusion. The most thorough analysis yet carried out on the map, conducted over several years by Yale conservation scientists, has found that it is "awash in 20th century ink". Previous analyses had indicated that there was modern ink on parts of the map, but the latest work, using cutting-edge tools and techniques, examined the entire document's elemental composition, showing that both the map itself and the accompanying text are in inks containing a titanium compound not used prior to the 1920s and most closely resembling pigment that was commercially produced in Norway in 1923. A genuine 15th century map would most probably have been drawn with iron gall ink, which is composed of iron sulphate, powdered gall nuts, and a binder. There is also clear evidence of intentional deception with an authentic mediaeval bookbinding instruction for *Speculum Historiale* being overwritten in modern ink to make it look like an instruction to bind the map into the volume. Given the matching wormholes, it appears that the Vinland Map is a modern fake, drawn on a blank endpaper

of *Speculum Historiale*.

Raymond Clemens, curator of early books and manuscripts at Yale's Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, which contains the map, says: "The Vinland Map is a fake, there is no reasonable doubt here. This new analysis should put the matter to rest... The altered inscription certainly seems like an attempt

to make people believe the map was created at the same time as the *Speculum Historiale*... It's powerful evidence that this is a forgery, not an innocent creation by a third party that was co-opted by someone else, although it doesn't tell us who perpetrated the deception." *news.yale.edu*, 1 Sept 2021; *boingboing.net*, 7 Sept, 2021.



ABOVE: Yale University curator of maps Alexander Vietor and Thomas Marston examining the map at the Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library in 1965.

## SIDELINES...

### EXCRUCIATING EEL

A man in Xinghua, China, inserted a 20cm (8in) eel into his rectum as a cure for constipation. Rather than relieving the blockage, the eel made its way up into the man's colon and then bit through it, escaping into his abdomen. He endured the pain for a day as he was "too shy to see the doctor", but then went to hospital where a life-saving operation removed the eel, still alive. This folk remedy has claimed other victims; in Guangdong a 50-year-old man had a 40cm (16in) eel removed in 2020, and an African carp was found in the stomach of a young man who claimed that the fish "slid into" his rectum when he accidentally sat on it. *globaltimes.cn*, 27 July 2021.

### VERNACULAR MAPPING

Ordnance Survey has released a new mapping tool designed to help emergency services find people in need of help. It allows vernacular local names to be overlaid on the official OS maps to speed up rescue times when people use those instead of the official ones. 7,500 names have been added to the map, including Stinky Bay, Crazy Mary's Hole and Nuncle Dicks, concentrating on coastal areas, but the intention is to add vernacular landmarks from right across the country in due course. *BBC News*, 22 Jul 2021.

### SPERM REVOLUTION

A team led by Daiyu Ito at the University of Yamanashi in Japan has revolutionised the way that scientists can send mouse sperm samples through the post. Previously, samples had to be sent in vials in liquid nitrogen or a freezer, but Ito's team have discovered that mouse sperm can be freeze dried onto paper and successfully revived after being posted. They have stored thousands of mouse samples this way, creating what the researchers have called a "sperm book". *New Scientist*, 5 Aug 2021.



MARTIN ROSS

## GHOST PHOTOS

Girls' nights in and out yield a spectre at the feast and an incorporeal penis



INSTAGRAM / TWO GIRLS ONE GHOST

ABOVE: Corinne, Sabrina and the ghost penis of New Orleans. BELOW: Who, or what, was the mysterious figure at the window?

### GHOSTLY PHALLUS

Among New Orleans's many supernatural attractions is the supposedly haunted John Lafitte's Blacksmith Bar, lit only by candlelight and named after a local 18<sup>th</sup> century pirate. While attending a hen party at the venue, ghost hunting podcasters Corinne Vien and Sabrina Deana-Roga took a number of photos in the hope of capturing supernatural presences. On examining the pictures later, they found that they had not captured any phantom figures, but, speaking on their podcast, Vien said: "We did not catch a photo of anyone's face, but we did capture a penis." While, as far as we can tell, a photo of an incorporeal penis is unique in the annals of ghost hunting, the Urban Dictionary defines "ghost penis" as "a clumpy fold in your pants that looks like an erected penis" and it is the name of a known medical condition where people who have had their penis amputated can still feel it. *D.Star*, 16 Aug 2021.

### PARTY SPECTRE

Rebecca Glassborrow from Coventry took a photo of seven of her friends while partying in a neighbour's flat, only to find

an eighth figure in the photo. As well as the seven women who posed for the photo, it also contains a gaunt, long-haired face looming over them at the back. Glassborrow said they all glanced over their shoulders wondering what the figure could have been after the photo was taken but could see nothing that could have been mistaken for the face. She admits to being left "creeped out" by the "scary" photo, and as she lives in the flat directly above the one where the picture was

taken has had sleepless nights thinking about the image. She said she feared that the block of flats, which is a converted factory, is haunted after she heard from a neighbour that a man died in the bath in the flat where the photo was taken. "We have heard some noises occasionally and we just put it down to 'we live in a block of flats, it must just be the neighbours', but we're not really sure," she said. *D.Mirror*, 25 May; *coventrytelegraph.net*, 26 May 2021.



KENNEDY NEWS AND MEDIA





# IGNOBELS 2021 | Upside down rhinos, defensive beards and fat, corrupt politicians...

Awarded every year by the Annals of Improbable Research, the IgNobel Prize rewards research that makes people laugh, then think. Previous years have seen the prize go to papers that involved homosexual necrophilia in ducks, the physics of dripping teapots and showing Star Wars films to locusts. The 2021 crop is no less startling and diverse.

Handed out by real Nobel laureates, although in an online ceremony thanks to Covid, this year's IgNobels rewarded researchers from 24 countries on six continents. Winners of the 10 prizes included Commander John A Mulrennan (retired) of the US Navy, who received the entomology prize for eradicating cockroaches on submarines with a powerful organophosphate insecticide. The ecology prize went to researchers from Spain and Iran for a paper entitled "The Wasted Chewing Gum Bacteriome", which used genetic analysis to identify the species of bacteria that grow on wads of chewing gum stuck to the pavement in various countries, while the transportation prize was won by an international consortium of researchers from Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Brazil, UK and the USA. They found that airlifting tranquillised rhinoceroses upside down is probably better than the current method of carrying them on their side in slings. The biology prize went to Dr Susanne Shötz of Lund University in Sweden for a series of papers on cat communication, looking at exactly what they (probably) mean by all the meows, purrs, trills, chirps, hisses, howls and growls they make. This research was particularly deserving of recognition as behavioural research on cats has a reputation for giving scientists nervous breakdowns.

Cem Bulut from Germany won the medicine prize for discovering that orgasm is at least as effective as commercially available



ABOVE: It turns out that the best way of airlifting a tranquillised rhino is upside down.

## Orgasm is at least as effective as commercial decongestants

decongestants at clearing a blocked nose. After developing his hypothesis through "self-observation" he recruited couples who were willing to use a device to measure their nasal airflow before sex, immediately after orgasm, and at a number of intervals afterwards, although he admits not everyone produced useable data, saying, "I think some people couldn't focus on the device." The chemistry prize went to research carried out by Professor Jonathan Williams on how odours released by cinema audiences change depending on what they are seeing on the screen, finding that they were different when people viewed comedy, suspense, or violence. It even proved possible to distinguish between different film age ratings by the levels of isoprene given off by the audience.

Research on beards won David Carrier the IgNobel peace prize. Carrier, a professor

of biology at the University of Utah, got the prize for research that investigated whether men evolved beards to protect their faces in fist fights. This involved dropping weights onto a bone-like material covered in sheep fleece and led to the conclusion that hairy skin is a significantly better energy absorber than bare skin. He is now wondering whether beards may also act as obscuring, making it hard for an assailant to accurately target someone's jaw.

The economics prize was won by Pavlo Blavatsky from Montpellier Business School who used a computer algorithm on photos of politicians to find that there was a high correlation between obesity and national corruption.

The physics prize went to Alessandro Corbetta's research, which explained why pedestrians don't collide with each other, and the kinetics prize to work by Hisashi Murakami and colleagues that showed why sometimes they do.

Presenting the ceremony, Annals of Improbable Research editor Mark Abrahams concluded: "If you didn't win an IgNobel tonight – and especially if you did – better luck next year." *Improbable.com*, 10 Sept 2021, *Guardian*, 10 Sept 2021.

## SIDELINES...

### WASHOUT

Burglar Terry Huntley, 45, stole a laptop and other items from a neighbour while they quarantined elsewhere, but on return they noticed furniture had been moved and that there were clothes in the washing machine. DNA on the clothes led police to Huntley who was also charged with the burglary of a second empty house. *Sun*, 2 July 2021.

### OWN GOAL

Daniel Burrell complained to police about a foul smell in his flat and on investigation they found Barrington Davis dead in the flat below, where he had clearly been lying for some weeks. Forensic investigation revealed that Davis had been stabbed 16 times and DNA found under his fingernails was identified as belonging to Burrell, who was charged with Davis's murder. *Sun*, 15 July 2021.

### POSSESSED

Truck driver Mohinder Singh claimed he was possessed after being arrested for mowing down four police officers in Melbourne, Australia. Singh, who also admitted to being sleep deprived, said that, prior to the accident, he had also smoked a variety of methamphetamine known as ice with a woman called Glenys Nannup, who claimed to be a "good witch", and had been possessed as a result. *Queensland Courier Mail*, 21 May 2021.

### PREDESTINED

In Florida, police arrested a woman for drink-driving after she slammed her car into a Taco Bell sign, then fled. Once they caught up with her, the name of the miscreant turned out to be Tanisha Booze. *D.Mirror*, 3 July 2021.

### TITANIC DISASTER

Three visitors to an attraction in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, which claims to be the world's largest *Titanic* museum, were taken to hospital with serious injuries after an iceberg collapsed and fell on them. The attraction, which contains over 400 artefacts from the shipwreck, including some of the ship's china and a battered deck chair, closed immediately after the incident and said it would take "at least four weeks" to rebuild the iceberg, which was made of real ice. *belfastlive.co.uk*, 3 Aug 2021.

## SIDELINES...

### BRANCHING BRAINS

A long-term study of 3,568 students in London, aged between nine and 15, has discovered that those who spent more time near trees had better cognitive performance and mental health in adolescence. The research showed that it had to be trees, and that spending time near grass or streams had no effect on children's brains. *sciencealert.com*, 24 July 2021.

### WELL MET

When Stella Pickford and Cathy Hickman exchanged details after their cars collided in New York, they were stunned to discover they were long-lost sisters separated at birth. A month later, when Pamela Woods knocked on the door of a house she wanted to buy in Texas, she found her brother David whom she had last seen in Wales 27 years earlier. *The People*, 17 Aug + 28 Sept 1997.

### MANHOLE MAN

Drivers in Ipswich, Queensland, Australia, were surprised when they spotted a man's head popping out of a manhole in the middle of busy Brisbane Road. Several stopped to help the man, who was described as wearing only underwear and covered in "brown muck" from head to toe, but he fled towards the nearby river before they could give him further assistance, leaving them with hands covered in "a repulsive substance". *Fassifern Guardian and Tribune*, 21 April 2021.

### SUMO SHOCK

Equestrian competitors in the Tokyo Olympics were less than impressed by obstacle 10 on the jumping course, complaining that it was spooking their horses. Part of the obstacle was a life-size model of a sumo wrestler that the riders approached from behind. "As you come around, you see a big guy's butt," said British rider Harry Charles. "It is very realistic," added Israel's Teddy Vlock. *[AP]* 4 Aug 2021.

## UNSETTLING TOYS

Need to find a new home for a creepy doll? Help is at hand...



ABOVE: Brian Jillson, Sara Derrickson of Unsettling Toys and a selection of their creepy, and sometimes unloved, playmates.

FT has periodically featured haunted dolls and other items (see, for example, **FT326:10-11**), but Brian Jillson and Sara Derrickson have turned the problem into a business. Their Portland, Oregon, company Unsettling Toys provides a service that will remove and rehome any haunted, possessed, or just fundamentally unsettling toys that people might want to get rid of. Their website says:

"We appreciate that not every toy is suited for every family. A doll who changes rooms, or a fluffy bear who stares may be a delight to some, and a horror for others. We take pride in matching unsettling toys with people who appreciate their 'quirks'." They also offer substitution services saying: "In some cases, a child or pet may be attached to an unsettling toy that needs to be removed from

the home. For this situation, we offer substitution services. When we pick up the unsettling toy, we will provide a comforting and fluffy substitution toy to help the child or pet with the change." With every removal, they also promise to return and retrieve the creepy toy again if it "ends up coming back on its own volition." *okwhatevery.org*, 30 Oct 2019; *boingboing.net*, 6 Sept 2021; *unsettlingtoys.com*.







# CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

## 264: GREAT SEXPECTATIONS

(Abundance of translated sources in Fant & Lefkowitz's *Women's Life in Greece & Rome*, 1982, and Lattimore's *Themes in Greek and Latin Epitaphs*, 1962)

Gay Marriage, LGBTQI, E-Harmony/Tinder, Trolling/Tweeting, Seeking the Perfect Mate – what have these to do with the ancients or our master Fort? Marriage and its constituents aren't topics of Fort's books – no pertinent references in Henry Schlanger's Index. But, a frequent theme of his short stories, e.g. "Ruckus", listed and readable on Mr X's website. Fort (1896) married English servant Anna Filan (aka Filing), who survived him until 1937. No children. According to first-hand testimonies, a union of opposites that worked. A "bustling little hostess" (Aaron Sussman), she was outgoing, privy to their neighbours' doings, and dragged Charles away from his clippings for nightly visits to the pictures. He, in turn, clearly somewhat overawed, was "very tender towards Anna", unaffected by her refusal to read any of his books. Fort did (*Books*, p947) spotlight one extraordinary marital dossier. The first wife of oilman WA Baker hanged herself (1924). His second (1931) was killed by a mysterious explosion that blew her bed to the ceiling – investigating experts were baffled.

Helen of Troy (pictured above): fact or fancy? What counts is what people believed and why; cf. Paul Veyne, *Did the Greeks Believe in Their Myths?* (Paula Wissing, English tr. 1988). Before her 'rape' by Paris, Helen had earlier been abducted by Theseus, who insisted his ideal mate must be of divine birth. She exotically filled this bill, being the product of Zeus descending as a swan, calling "Take Me to Your Leda", the result being Helen born from an egg, a challenge not yet faced in *Call The Midwife*. After the Trojan War, Homer describes Helen as back in Sparta as a Hausfrau devoted to her knitting – must hope ex-war-hero hubby Menelaus had become a pipe and slippers man...

Other early Greek poets were much rougher on women: misogyny or homosexuality? Peasant farmer Hesiod bluntly advises, "Get a woman and an ox," elsewhere advising a man should wait until 30, then marry a neighbouring virgin four years past puberty. Semonides penned a diatribe against all women – paralleled in Rome by Juvenal – likening them to various animals and insects, concluding they are "Zeus's worst plague"; cf. Hugh Lloyd-Jones, *The Female of the Species* (1986).

Yet another poet, Hipponax, emitted what

might be dubbed the earliest tweet:

*Two days a woman's best; the days she's wed,  
The day she's carried from your doorstep – dead.*

Had Athens had *Hello!* magazine, it would have splashed the wedding of Hipparete, whose mega-rich husband expensively palmed her off to the city's Number One playboy, Alcibiades. Finally tiring of his infidelities, she went to file a divorce, only to have him pick her up and deposit her back at the far from home sweet home.

Two parallel Graeco-Roman texts detail the perfect wife. Xenophon reports Socrates's recipe: she should be young, educated, good at knitting and baking, keep the slaves in order, go easy on make-up, be always ready to gratify hubby's desires.

Pliny the Younger commends his wife for her unceasing praise and support for his barrister career and poetry-writing: she applauds his every speech, transcribes his verses, sits close leading the applause at his every recital, sets them to music and performs them. Pliny's editor, Sherwin White, remarks, "This letter is often condemned as intolerable by modern standards". Doesn't compare, though, with the now discredited chestnut about the Englishman's perfect wife: A deaf and dumb nymphomaniac who keeps a pub.

Greek and Roman epitaphs run to a pattern. The wife was always dutiful, good at childbearing and with wool, pleasant to look at. Their physical attributes are rarely described, except in the case of Allia Potestas, whose breasts and legs are poetically drooled over. But she was the man's *maitresse en titre*, not his wife; likewise, Roman love poets (Ovid and co) always celebrated their girlfriends, never their wives.

Particular wives became perpetual paradigms, for easy instance Cornelia, honoured by a statue as 'Mother of the Gracchi' for how she educated them. When asked why she wore no jewels, the reply was, "My sons are my jewels," a riposte that may allude to senatorial sumptuary laws that vainly attempted to curb female 'bling'.

Then there was Arria, an imperial throwback to semi-mystic Republican courage. When her husband (under death warrant) hesitated to kill himself, she stabbed herself, handed the dagger to him saying, "Look, my dear, it doesn't hurt."

Wifey had to be chaste, ideally never re-marrying if husband predeceased. He could legally and socially do anything.

As Augustus 'tweeted' in verse: "Because Antony fucks Glaphyra, Fulvia demands I fuck her. Should I also bugger Manius if he asks? Does it matter which and whose holes we penetrate?"

As now, many marriages, 'glam' and ordinary, went badly wrong. Seneca remarks that every issue of Rome's daily newspaper (*Acta Diurna*) reported a society divorce (Latin word origin *divortium*). Plus, violent domestics. Wives on the Greek island of Lemnos bumped off their menfolk for accusing them of rank body odour – no ancient deodorants (nor toilet paper). Nero kicked his pregnant wife to death. So did multi-millionaire Herodes Atticus; cf. Sarah Pomeroy's *The Murder of Regilla* (2007).

Juvenal mentions a wife who'd poisoned seven husbands; Jerome knew one who'd disposed of 22. Some people never learn. Jerome records a man who'd had 20 wives, a woman with 22 husbands. Juxtapose Baptist minister Glynn Wolfe, world marriages (29) holder, last wife being Linda Essex, joint-champion with 23 nuptials.

Same-sex marriages originated in Rome – no sign of Greek ones. Cicero (a possible joke, but suggestive) accuses Antony of being Curio's legal 'husband'. Nero married two youths, likewise Elagabalus, the latter also transgending himself with an anatomical insertion. These unions were outlawed by imperial edict (16 Dec AD 342, Theodosian Code 9. 7. 3), promising the culprits "exquisite penalties". Byzantine emperor Justinian in Novels (a legal term) 77 (AD 538) and 141 (AD 559) banned sodomy on the grounds it caused earthquakes (Greek word for which was Theomania = Wrath of God).

For modern complement, I adduce Penrose Halson's *The Marriage Bureau* (2017), a delightful account of Heather Jenner's famous eponymous pre-Internet enterprise. It ends with long lists of male and female requirements for the right mate. Representative masculine samples include:

Able to play a portable instrument  
 Not made up to hell  
 Prefer Jewish girl but any other will do  
 South Welsh, NOT North Welsh, no  
 frequenters of art schools  
 No Socialists, no bridge players  
 She must live on gravel  
 Nobody called Florence  
 Widow of pharmacist particularly suitable  
 Bright enough to make fair success of a  
 Times crossword puzzle  
 (Cliché number one: Takes all sorts...  
 Cliché number two: Be careful what you wish  
 for...)



## PAUL SIEVEKING looks at new evidence of ancient humans, giant monsters and Neanderthal art

### DISTANT COUSINS

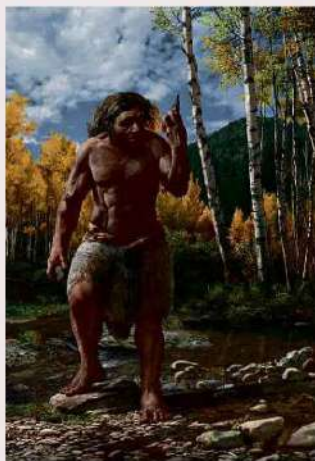
• A cranial fragment and jaw of a previously unknown ancient human species have been found near Ramla in Israel, dated to between 140,000 and 120,000 years BP, and named the "Nesher Ramla *Homo* type". This individual – with no chin and very large teeth – might represent the last surviving population of Middle Pleistocene *Homo*, precursors of Neanderthals and our own species. Researchers speculate that early members of this hominin group were present in the Near East some 400,000 years ago and resemble "pre-Neanderthal" groups in Europe. Analysis of stone tools associated with this group shows they had fully mastered technology until recently linked only to Neanderthals and *H sapiens*, suggesting cultural interaction. Nesher Ramla *Homo* was an efficient hunter of large and small game, used wood for fuel, cooked or roasted meat, and maintained fires. *BBC News*, [science.sciencemag.org](https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-56842121), 24 June; *D.Mall*, 25 June 2021.

• A huge fossilised skull, known as the Harbin cranium, represents a new branch of the human family tree more closely related to modern humans than to Neanderthals. It was reportedly discovered in 1933 by a construction worker helping build a bridge on the Songhua river running through Harbin, in Heilongjiang province, which translated means Black Dragon River, hence the new human's name, "Dragon man". The region was under Japanese occupation at the time. Suspecting its cultural value, the Chinese worker concealed the skull, carefully wrapped, at the bottom of an abandoned well, where it remained until 2018. The man told his grandson about the skull before he died, which is how it eventually got into the hands of scientists at Hebei Geo University.

It has been assigned a new species, *Homo longi*, from the Mandarin word *long*, meaning dragon, and is at least 146,000 years old. The well-preserved skull belonged to a heavily built man aged about 50 with large, almost square eye sockets, thick brow ridges, delicate cheekbones, a wide mouth, and oversized teeth (one huge molar remains). His wide, bulbous nose allowed him to breathe huge volumes of air, indicating a high-energy lifestyle, while sheer size would have helped him withstand the



LEFT: A 3D model showing the skull and jaw fragments of the newly identified Nesher Ramla *Homo*. BELOW LEFT: An artist's impression of "Dragon Man".



brutally cold winters in the region. He was probably taller than the average modern man. The skull is 23cm (9in) long and more than 15cm (6in) wide, substantially larger than a modern human's, and has ample room, at 1,420ml, for a modern human brain. It joins a number of early human remains uncovered in China that have proven difficult to categorise. These include remains from Dali, Jinniushan, Hualongdong and the Xiahe jawbone from

the Tibetan Plateau [FT400:14]. There has been a fierce debate about whether these remains represent primitive examples of *Homo sapiens*, Neanderthals, Denisovans, or something else entirely. The Denisovans, named in 2008, were first identified from DNA retrieved from a 50,000-30,000-year-old finger bone discovered in Denisova Cave, Russia [FT262:22, 273:18, 389:14]. Chris Stringer, a palaeoanthropologist at London's Natural History Museum, thinks Dragon man is Denisovan.

Human evolution no longer resembles a straightforward progression or simple evolutionary tree; it is more like a dense intertwined bush, with more than 20 named species; there's *Homo antecessor*, *H floriensis*, *H denisova*, *H habilis*, *H rudolfensis*, *H ergaster*, *H erectus*, *H naledi*, *H luzonensis*, *H neanderthalensis*, and so on. Only *Homo sapiens* survives – apparently. There is much disagreement about whether all these taxonomic names are justified, especially as several human types appear to have interbred. *BBC News*, [theguardian.com](https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-56842121), [sciencemag.org](https://www.sciencemag.org), 25 June; *D.Telegraph*, *D.Mall*, 26 June; *Mail on Sunday*, 4 July 2021.

### NEANDERTHAL CARVING

The toe bone of a prehistoric deer carved with lines by Neanderthals is one of the oldest works of art ever found, radiocarbon dated to 51,000 years ago. It is further evidence that Neanderthals – *Homo neanderthalensis* – were able to express symbolism through art, once attributed only to our own species. The bone was unearthed in a cave in the Harz Mountains of central Germany, about 150 miles (240km) southwest of Berlin. The front is carved with overlapping chevrons that appear to point upward, and there is a line of smaller incisions on its lower edge, which seems to have served as its base. Microscopic analysis of the bone shows that the carvings are very deep, which suggests that it was boiled to soften it before carving began. It was unearthed alongside the shoulder blades of deer and the intact skull of a cave bear – rare objects that might indicate that the assemblage had ritual





LEFT: The Smithsonian's full-scale model of *Titanoboa cerrejonensis* in the act of swallowing a crocodile.  
BELOW: The carved bone discovered in the Harz Mountains is further evidence of Neanderthal art.



meaning. Archaeologists have also found ancient eagle talons used as pendants by Neanderthals, as well as cave paintings in Spain [FT288:22] that may be older – their date is disputed. It's likely that a lot of Neanderthal artistic objects were carved from wood – a much easier medium to work with than stone or bone – that has long since perished.

The Einhornhöhle ("Unicorn Cave") where the carved bone was unearthed has been famous since at least the 16th century. It got its name from the fossilised bones found there, supposedly from unicorns, that were once ground up to make medicines. Excavations since the 1980s have established that the cave was inhabited by successive generations of Neanderthals, from at least 130,000 years ago until about 47,000 years ago. Groups of *Homo sapiens* also inhabited the cave, but only much later, after about 12,000 years ago. The earliest evidence for *Homo sapiens* in the southeast of Europe is from about 45,000 years ago, and it's not thought that they arrived in central Europe until at least 10,000 years after that. *NBC News*, 5 July 2021.

## GIANTS ROAMED THE EARTH

- A snake 42ft (12.8m) long once slithered through South American jungles eating entire crocodiles. The monster reptile, which weighed around 2,500lb (1,134kg), crushed its prey to death. You will be relieved to know that *Titanoboa cerrejonensis* died out around 60 million years ago. Fossils of the snake, the largest ever found, were discovered in Palaeocene strata in a Colombian coalmine. The Smithsonian Institution houses a full-scale model, complete with a half-swallowed

crocodile. By comparison, the biggest anaconda reliably documented was only 27.2ft (8.3m) long. Burmese pythons (*Python bivittatus*), now common in the Florida Everglades to the detriment of mammalian populations, grow to a mere 23ft (7m). *Washington Post*, 9 Jan 2018.

- A denizen of Colombia in the late Miocene era 10 million years ago was *Stupendemys geographicus*, the largest land turtle ever found. It had a horned shell 8ft (2.4m) long and weighed 1.1 tons, making it twice as big as the leatherback, the largest turtle alive today. It may have used its armoured carapace in fights to the death with male rivals over mates and battled with alligators. Its remains have been unearthed at the La Venta archaeological site, an animal graveyard in the Tatacoa Desert. It is almost 100 times the size of its closest living relative, the Amazon river turtle. Massive crocodiles may have influenced the turtles' evolution, with bite marks on some specimens – including a lone crocodile tooth lodged in a shell. While carnivorous mammals had not yet arrived on the isolated continent, 40ft (12m) crocodiles and alligators were the apex predators. *D.Mail*, 13 Feb 2020.

- Another South American monster, *Patagotitan mayorum*, is probably the largest creature that ever walked the Earth. The sauropod weighed at least 62 tons and measured more than 115ft (40m) from nose to tail. The giant herbivore weighed about the same as 10 African elephants and lived 100 million years ago during the Cretaceous period. Its bones were discovered in a

quarry at La Flecha ranch, Chubut Province, Argentina, in 2012. It took three years to excavate and a further two years for laboratory analysis. Its thighbone alone is 8ft (2.4m) long and weighs half a ton. Palaeontologists found 150 fossils belonging to at least six dinosaurs, who died in a flood plain before being preserved in mud. The species had a probable maximum body mass of 70 tons, more than 15 per cent heavier than *Dreadnoughtus*, the largest 'titanosaur' from which a thighbone and forearm have been preserved. Although some estimates have given another Patagonia titanosaur, *Argentinosaurus*, the title of biggest land animal ever, these have not been based on limb measurements and are probably erroneous. Vertebræ from *Argentinosaurus* suggest it was 10 per cent smaller than *Patagotitan*. The name *mayorum* commemorates the Mayo family, owners of the ranch where the fossils were excavated. *D.Mail*, 10 Aug 2017.

- The fossil of a giant 'cannibal' parrot that roamed the Earth 19 million years ago has been found in what was a Miocene forest in the Central Otago region of New Zealand. *Heracles inexpectatus* (love the name!) was almost 3ft 6in (1.07cm) tall, twice the size of the largest parrot alive today. It weighed around 14lb (6kg) and had a huge beak able to crack into and break down most food sources, including other parrots. It lived in a diverse subtropical forest among laurels, palms and podocarp trees. In the same St Bathans excavation area, palaeontologists have found evidence of crocodilians, turtles, bats and more than 40 bird species. *D.Telegraph*, 7 Aug 2019.



# Beyond the g factor

DAVID HAMBLING looks at our current understanding of intelligence... and what the future may hold

Intelligence is a powerful but elusive quality, easy to recognise but difficult to define, perhaps the most important factor in distinguishing humanity, but the least understood. While researchers are getting closer to grasping what it is and how it works, their discoveries do not always make for comfortable reading.

The nature of intelligence has always been a topic of debate and there has never been a satisfactory, agreed-upon definition. In 1923 American psychologist Edwin Boring famously stated that "Intelligence is what is measured by intelligence tests", which at least simplifies matters.

In the 1980s, researchers led by Harvard psychologist Howard Gardner argued that there was no single intelligence, but that we all possess several different types, not only the obvious 'logical-mathematical' variety but also 'musical' and 'bodily-kinesthetic' intelligences among others.

Intelligence tests combine questions challenging mathematical, verbal and spatial reasoning skills. And while the popular 10-minute version may not tell you much, the full IQ test, which takes over an hour and is administered by a qualified examiner, has proven consistently reliable at assessing cognitive skills.

While people are usually stronger in one area than another, there is a significant correlation between different skills, suggesting that Gardner was wrong and there is an underlying basic intelligence. Someone who is strong on mathematical abilities is also likely to score well on verbal reasoning. Specific skills account for around half the variation between people; the other half appears to be an innate general intelligence which researchers refer to as *g* or the *g* factor.

*g* is not the same as IQ, but seems to be related, and a growing body of research has shown the impact of *g* on everyday life. *g* is particularly associated with academic achievement, as it is linked with the ability to absorb and apply new concepts. Later on, it is also a predictor of job performance, career progression and income.

The idea that some people have an inherently higher *g* – and are therefore fated to do better than others – does not fit well with a society in which everyone is supposed to have an equal chance. What makes it even more challenging is that this difference appears to be inherited.

Researchers have found that the IQ of children who were adopted at birth, however



LEFT: The world's first AI robot artist, Ai-Da, pictured alongside her self-portrait earlier this year.

genes do influence our intelligence, which in turn affects our life chances.

While current genetic tests have been shown to be useless at predicting intelligence, as the science progresses this is likely to change. At the same time, genetic modification offers the possibility of engineering intelligence into the next generation.

This kind of tinkering is on a completely different order from selecting brown eyes or straight teeth for your child. If it becomes feasible, it will give the debate over genetic modification new urgency. Especially because the next stage would not simply be intelligent children, but super-intelligent ones. Such a development is probably decades away, but entirely foreseeable.

Meanwhile research into another aspect of intelligence is moving faster. Artificial Intelligence or AI is now a part of everyday life. An AI-enabled software routinely turns our speech into text, recognises our faces or translate from one language to another. As with intelligence research in humans, the definition remains elusive.

Specific approaches, such as machine learning and neural networks, are proving fruitful, but many question whether what they do is genuinely intelligent. The one thing we know for sure is that they are not 'thinking' like humans, even when they achieve the same results.

As with humans, the whole debate about whether AI is really intelligent can be sidestepped by using an IQ test and using the result as an indication, however imperfect, of intelligence. So far, they are not much of a match for humans: in a 2016 test, Siri had an IQ of 24, and Google Assistant 47, which would correspond to mild mental impairment in a human (the average human score is 100). Elsewhere, researchers assessed the best AI can match the IQ of a four-year-old.

What we can say is that AI is getting smarter – and while the rate of progress may well flatten out again, in a recent survey of AI researchers, half believed AI will reach human-like levels before 2060. This may be just in time for the first generation of children with genetically engineered intelligence to reach maturity and find that they have been surpassed, and the issue of human intelligence has become a matter of historical interest only.

they were brought up, did not bear much relation to that of their adoptive parents. Instead, it correlated strongly with the IQ of their biological parents. Interestingly, as the children grew older, this correlation grew stronger.

Prof Robert Plomin is a specialist in behavioural genetics at King's College, London, and lead researcher on the Twins Early Development Study, which has followed 10,000 pairs of twins in the UK from 1995 onwards, seeking to find how different traits are passed down through generations. The findings from TEDS on intelligence have mirrored hundreds of other studies.

In a 2015 paper on genetics and intelligence, Plomin noted that the factor "increases from about 20% in infancy to perhaps 80% in later adulthood." If it is inherited, it is a matter of genetics. However, there is no single gene for intelligence; rather it is influenced by several hundred different genes.

Any research into this area is likely to be fraught. A 2021 paper in *Nature* on "Genetic variation, brain, and intelligence differences" from the University of Edinburgh starts with a summary of the controversies over intelligence. This runs from the Victorian psychologist and anthropologist Francis Galton who invented the concept of eugenics (see **FT245:14**), to the 1994 bestseller *The Bell Curve* (see **FT362:16**), which was widely criticised for its treatment of IQ and ethnic group differences.

The authors of the genetic variation paper emphasise that "g might be important, but it is far from being all that matters." This is not much consolation when showing that our



ADVERTISEMENT

# NEW PODCAST

In Episode 10, Dan and Ciaran investigate  
the world's trickiest treasure hunt



Listen now on [funkidslive.com/podcasts](https://funkidslive.com/podcasts)  
and all podcast platforms

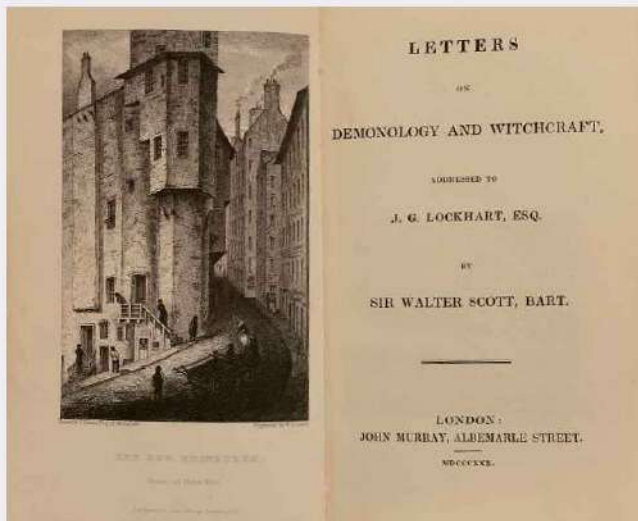
Created in partnership with





# Scott and the supernatural

ALAN MURDIE explores Sir Walter Scott's *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft*



ABOVE LEFT: The first edition of Scott's *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft*, with a frontispiece showing the House of Major Weir, the notorious sorcerer of Edinburgh. ABOVE RIGHT: Sir Walter Scott and his deerhound "Bran" painted by Sir John Watson Gordon in 1830, the year the *Letters* were published.

This year marks the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832), and we may look forward to a year of events and celebrations of the great writer and all his works – at least in some quarters.

A glorious multi-spired memorial to Scott stands proudly a short distance from Edinburgh Waverley railway station, like a 'Shape of Things to Come' style rocket. Begun in 1844, it was completed in August 1846 with a formal dedication ceremony attended by great numbers. It is the second largest memorial erected to any writer extant anywhere in the world (the largest is in Cuba), reflecting just how revered Scott once was in the eyes of earlier generations. The current visitor information plaque displayed at the monument pays tribute to him as the originator of "a new genre – the historical novel" and as the man who "almost single-handedly rehabilitated the image of Scotland". A voluminous and indefatigable writer with an astonishing breadth of vision, Scott revived and invented many elements

## Scott was a prime recorder and promoter of folklore before the term was coined

which are accepted as part of traditional Scottish identity and culture. It is a vision that has been happily adopted by much of the world ever since, though not without increasing controversy lately in both the UK and the United States.

Scott was a prime recorder and promoter of folklore before the word was coined, retrieving the stories, ballads, and legends of the Borders from loss as oral traditions. In particular, he powerfully employed the topography of the landscape: "Narrow valleys... moors and crags – confined, desolate spots," as a Professor Parsons put it in his *Witchcraft and Demonology in Scott's Fiction* (1964), creating a seductive vision of a mysterious, haunted land.

Therefore, it may come as a surprise and disappointment to examine Scott's own *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft* published in 1830, conceived as a series of letters addressed to his son-in-law. Relatively little-known or appreciated today, it rates as an early sceptical classic, an individual study of what Scott termed "a dark chapter in human nature" and the remainder of which he hoped would soon be vanquished by an enlightened modern outlook.

In the book he recalled how in his younger days he had been seduced by the eerie and the "vivacity of fancy which engages us in youth to pass over much that is absurd, in order to enjoy some single trait of imagination". He confessed: "Many hours have I lost – 'I would their debt was less' – in examining old, as well as more recent narratives of this character." Then he grew up, the idea of the supernatural being one which "dies within us when we obtain the age of manhood".

My own copy of the *Letters* is a Victorian



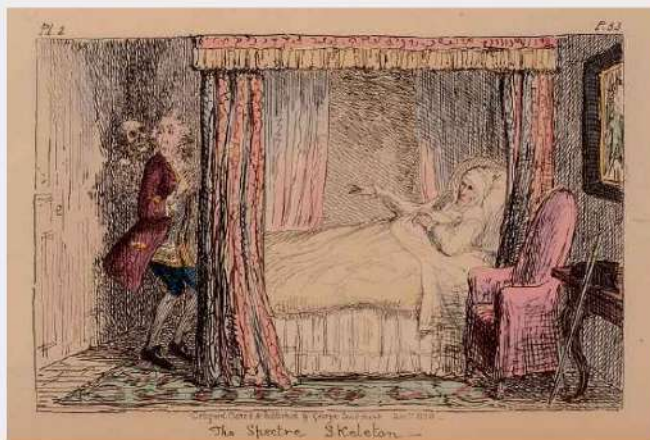
blue-bound edition embossed with the golden shield of Preston Grammar School. This is a sign of how both Scott and books themselves were once revered. The dedicatory certificate records its award as a third-form school prize to a pupil named James Matthew Hibbert at Midsummer 1877. This was the age when the cultured audience of the time would have known and could readily quote from biblical and classical texts and history ancient and modern, and when passages of text were learned by heart for reciting aloud (and who routinely has books bound today?) Perhaps his teachers feared Master Hibbert needed safeguarding from just the same imaginative temptations as afflicted Scott in his youth.

With each Letter, Scott shares the cast-offs and parings of his prestigious memory and reading. Neither psychologically or culturally ordered, the *Letters* range over material drawn from many different cultures and sources, creating a proto-work of fortunea, packing in the superstitious detritus and credulities of the ages. The result is an amorphous collection of historical facts, textual references, and anecdotes, most derived from a substantial collection of esoteric and occult books (many of them exceedingly rare) kept in a locked book cabinet within his 9,000-volume library, preserved in his ornate home at Abbotsford. Facsimile copies of these books are held at the Advocate's Library in Edinburgh.

A particularly fortunea curiosity is the series of visions that occurred at Crossford Boat in South Lanarkshire and at the Mains on the waters of the Clyde in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. There in June and July 1686 large crowds gathered over several days to watch dropping from the sky "showers of bonnets, hats, guns and swords which covered the trees and ground".

However, lest we think at once of physical falls of frogs or fishes, these mysterious showers were accompanied by visions of companies of armed men descending after these items. It was literally raining men, but these all proved spectral and illusory, for they vanished completely upon reaching the ground, followed by reinforcements materialising afresh who followed the same path and pattern. One observer who attended the scene over several afternoons found two thirds of spectators averred they could see this phenomenon, whereas a third of the crowd, including himself, could not. A number who experienced the vision were overcome by a contagious fright, shaking and trembling and talking excitedly of witchcraft, second sight and the Devil.

Similar illusions occurred four years later in 1690 at Gloucester, in the county of Essex, New England. British colonists



ABOVE: Two of George Cruikshank's coloured etchings for the first edition of the *Letters*, illustrating supernatural incidents described, and usually dismissed as superstition, by Scott.

believed they were persecuted by demons in the guise of raiding "Indians and Roman Catholic Frenchmen". Settlers were plagued for a fortnight by these entities, even exchanging fire with them, yet the supposed demons "never killed or scalped anyone". This convinced the English settlers their foes "were not real Indians or Frenchmen, but the devil and his agents who had assumed such an appearance, though seemingly not enabled effectually to support it, for the molestation of the colony."

Scott presages both anomalous psychology and the psychosocial hypothesis in implying such apparitions are the products of inchoate fears and anxieties residing in the minds of sensitive and susceptible people. He explains

how human perceptions may be thrown into disarray by the "depraved state of the bodily organs" generating false impressions in the eyes and nerves. Their minds so betrayed, sufferers dream up ghastly entities. All reasoning faculties are quashed, sometimes irrevocably. People singly and collectively fall victim to rumours and exaggerated stories to the extent of hallucinating.

Worse still, such fantasies convert into horrible programmes for practical social action, licensed or unlicensed, aimed at purging these fantastic menaces from the community, despite their only existence being within the warped minds of believers. Along with instances of demoniacal possession, Scott blames a mixture of the excesses of fundamentalism mixed



# GHOSTWATCH

with brain-based delusions fuelled further by a small minority of deceitful conjurors and the unreliable ramblings of mentally ill individuals. At best, he concedes some belief may arise from a dim awareness of a divine essence within each human (a religious doctrine with which Scott was familiar via Presbyterianism). The argument is consistent with the strand of theological opinion that all miracles ceased after the time of the New Testament, once all the apostles were dead, the Bible thereafter supplying everything needed for a functioning life and spiritual survival. Otherwise, all accounts of miracles and supernatural entities are either physically or morally impossible, with the supernatural entirely explicable as being errors, delusions, or through some other natural hypothesis.

The consequences through history are shown in the grim records of crimes, superstitious sacrifices, executions, crusades and witch trials that claim numerous innocent casualties, with Scott citing the persecutions of witches and sorcerers across Britain, France and Sweden in particular. Rationalist philosophy and a remote Presbyterianism are the cure.

After extensive forays into the realms of witches and fairies, Scott's final two Letters touch on the subject of ghosts and apparitions, reviving stories from around Britain and yet more witchery. Pre-Freudian



ABOVE: Glamis Castle, whose oppressive atmosphere was first publically noted by Scott.

in outlook, Scott keeps discourse within respectable boundaries. In his ninth Letter he only briefly alludes to the perversions of Edinburgh's Major Weir, put to death on Edinburgh's Grassmarket in 1670 for sorcery and incest committed along with his sister Jean Weir. After the Major's death, locals spoke of hearing his coach and horses thundering down the road on its way to Hell (or in some versions,

Dalkeith) and his wizard's staff, which was burned with his body, was seen floating along the street searching for its master. Scott records that the long abandoned and haunted home of the wizard Major that stood on the West Bow was being pulled down as he wrote. However, as Jan Bondeson discovered, parts of the building survived, now converted into a Quaker meeting centre (see 'Neighbours from



ABOVE: Walter Scott's 9,000-volume library in his home at Abbotsford, near Galashiels in the Scottish Borders.





ABOVE: Dunvegan Castle on the Isle of Skye, where Scott spent an undisturbed night in a supposedly haunted room.

hell: remains of wizard's house of horrors are found', *Daily Mail*, 7 Feb 2014 and Jan Bondeson, 'The House of Major Weir', **FT311:30-36**). Similarly, Scott keeps the lid on the sexual aspects of the scandalous back story attached to the apparition of Mrs Leakey, the 17<sup>th</sup> century 'Whistling Ghost of Minehead' in Somerset, where tales of her are still current (see *Mother Leakey and the Bishop: A Ghost Story* (2007) by Peter Marshall; Ghostwatch, **FT303:18-19**).

So strong was this opinion, he apparently even dismissed his own personal experience of hearing strange nocturnal sounds at his home at Abbotsford April 1818, the same night as the architect and supervisor craftsman James Bullock died in London. Scott was awoken by loud sounds that resembled half-a-dozen men hard at work putting up boards and furniture, and nothing can be more certain than that there was nobody on the premises at the time." (Scott's Diary, 28-29 April 1818).

For many readers, both in 1830 and since, Scott's vehement denunciation in the *Letters* of the supernatural in all its forms was a shock, the last thing to be expected of a writer whose stories include seers, witches, astrologers, elves, spirits and the Devil.

On publication of the *Letters*, one aggrieved Irish correspondent signing himself Caspar Oufle wrote a lengthy protest to *The National Magazine* in 1830:

"Sir, though aware that some inconvenience attended these credulities, which grew with my growth – I hold that such impressions were more reputable and ingenuous, than that cold scepticism, that neo-logical Sadducees, I see pervading the rising race of men. I hold that a belief in the connexion between the two worlds,

## Scott's vehement denunciation of the supernatural in all its forms was a shock

fitted men to fear both God and the king, and better kept them from meddling with those who are given to change, than the rationalism of the present day" (they knew how to write 'Letters to the Editor' in those days).

Oufle expressed his immense regret that Sir Walter Scott should "lend himself to destroy all the fond and wholesome credulities which should belong to a man who fears and believes in an invisible world". (*The National Magazine*, vol.1, no.6, Dec 1830).

Another who deplored the *Letters* was Lewis Spence (1878- 1950), stating they occupied "a curious and pathetic place in Sir Walter Scott's vast literary output".

Undoubtedly, this was because Spence was of a mystical bent himself, a prolific author and enthusiast for Atlantis and the editor of an excellent *Encyclopaedia of the Occult*; it is hard to know where he found time to be vice-President of the Folklore Society and a founder of the Scottish National Party.

In fact, Scott did not care for his *Letters* himself, taken only as a commission because of heavy debts for which he was personally liable, sustained in the aftermath of the collapse of his publishing house. Scott was compelled to try and write his way out of financial ruin. This meant generating stories and other works at a crippling rate, inspiring the regrets about

what he saw now as the wasted hours of his youth. Although his beloved Abbotsford estate was eventually secured and returned to him by his creditors the same year, he died on 21 September 1832, on a bed placed near the dining room window after a series of strokes. His ghost is still said to appear there "on rare occasions" (Peter Underwood in *A Gazetteer of Scottish and Irish Ghosts*, 1974).

As for Scott today, his reputation is a mixed one in modern literary and political circles. "Rather fallen out of fashion" was how BBC Radio 4 delicately described Scott (*World at One*, 17 August 2021). At this year's Edinburgh International Book Festival, Scott's writing was the subject of one session scrutinising his responsibility for an overly romanticised and synthetic "tartan and shortbread" Scotland with Stuart Kelly, author of *Scott-Land: The Man who Invented a Nation* and Caroline McCracken-Flesher who argued in her book *Possible Scotlands: Walter Scott and the Story of Tomorrow* that Scott's tales, however romanticised, also provided for a national future. Ideas along these lines were originally advanced concerning Celtic nationalism some 50 years ago by the tragic scholar of the occult James Webb (see *The Flight from Reason*, 1971, vol.1; 'The Damned' by Gary Lachman **FT150:34-38**, Sept 2001).

Ironically, for a writer who saw himself as enlightened and progressive in his thinking, Scott is now criticised as out of date and reactionary. Scott's endorsement of monarchy, chivalry and rank as the stuff of nations along with his actual support for the Union of the British Isles is wholly out of step with Scottish nationalist politicians today (as one suspects are also the ideas of Lewis Spence).



# GHOSTWATCH

WILLIAM VAN DE POLL

Just recently, one earnest and disapproving literary lady of my acquaintance recommended that instead of reading Scott's *The Heart of Midlothian* I ought to seek greater enlightenment in the anti-imperialist novelist Frantz Fanon (1925-1961) and his *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). Apparently, this would also help liberate me by helping me understand that ideas about ghosts and spirits are a by-product of capitalist ideology and colonial oppression (though rather failing to explain why indigenous societies believed in ghosts and spirits long before Europeans arrived).

Even more severe attacks come from a rising tide of revisionist voices in the United States 'deconstructing' Scott's works and accusing his novels of racial prejudice to the point of inspiring the slave-owning Southern plutocracy of the pre-1865 Confederate states, and even of helping cause the American Civil War. (e.g. 'How Walter Scott Started the American Civil War' by Scott Horton in *Harper's Magazine*, 29 July 2007). This seems as absurd as trying to blame the occasional crimes of vampire-obsessed modern teenagers on the writings of Bram Stoker.

Whatever critics may think, there is no escaping Scott's lasting contribution in his firmly rooting Scotland's castles and ruins among the premier haunted locations in the world. For instance, his novel *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1819) contains a scene where the door to the bridal chamber is broken down after hideous shrieks are heard emanating from it; the bridegroom is found grievously wounded at the threshold and bleeding profusely and the blood-spattered bride crouched in the chimney corner, grinning and quite insane. It is she who supposedly haunts the castle and its grounds today. (See *Haunted Castles & Houses of Scotland*, 2004, by Martin Coventry). Scott's long narrative poem 'The Lay of the Last Minstrel' (1805) carries an early reference to the mystical aspects of Rosslyn Chapel in Lothian (see **FT167:50, 212:40-43**), then in a derelict and overgrown condition, long before its mentions in *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail* (1982) and Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*. In its Sixth Canto, Scott records how an uncanny light would blaze in the chapel whenever a member of the St Clair family was about to die, within a poem telling of a spell book plucked from the tomb of legendary magician Michael Scot and featuring goblins and sprites.

Two personal reminiscences in the *Letters* by Scott have proved the most lasting influence of all. He was the first to express publicly the oppressive atmosphere at Glamis Castle in the Vale of Strathmore in 1793, and in the *Letters* records a night spent alone in a haunted chamber, inspiring him to pen the



## Dame Flora McLeod proudly told the story of the banner's supposed fairy origins

memorable line, "... as I heard door after door shut, after my conductor had retired, I began to consider myself as too far from the living and somewhat too near to the dead." That was virtually all that happened, but it set off a fashion for locating ghost stories and uncanny experiences in Glamis Castle during the 19<sup>th</sup> century (see **FT161:48**). By the 1870s, these had expanded into a bevy of hauntings, the existence of a secret chamber containing a ghastly secret and a full-blown monster legend, ultimately qualifying Glamis as "probably the most haunted building in Britain" in the opinion of Peter Underwood in *This Haunted Isle* (1984).

Scott's second inspirational visit was on 23 August 1814 to Dunvegan Castle, which stands on the eastern shores of the Isle of Skye, where he spent an undisturbed night in a bed in a supposedly haunted

**LEFT:** Dame Flora McLeod and (below) the Fairy Flag, the Dunvegan Cup and Sir Rory Mor's Horn, heirlooms of the MacLeods of Dunvegan

room. This mention of Dunvegan helped cement the reputation of the castle, the ancestral seat of the MacLeod family and the oldest continuously inhabited castle in Scotland. More exceptional than its vague ghost was its Fairy Tower and celebrated Fairy Flag obtained by the MacLeods from the fairies as a protective talisman. The flag is still preserved by the Macleod family at Dunvegan, a relic promoted especially in the 20<sup>th</sup> century by Dame Flora McLeod (1878-1976), who proclaimed herself the 28<sup>th</sup> clan chieftain and proudly told the story of the banner's supposed fairy origins. This pose duly attracted censure from Scottish author Alasdair Alpin MacGregor (1899-1970), who openly admitted making "scathing comments on all her clan and chieftain nonsense". (See Alpin MacGregor's *The Enchanted Isles: Hebridean Portraits and Memories*, 1967). And this, in spite of MacGregor being responsible for classic volumes on British ghosts and Hebridean lore and being pro-fairy himself (see his *The Ghost Book*, 1957, and *Phantom Footsteps*, 1959).

Alas, space prevents detailing Sir Walter Scott's alleged messages from beyond the grave obtained via mediums such as Leonora Piper (1857-1950), referring to monkeys living on the Sun. Other curiosities include the appearance of words and expressions from Scott's diary entries of summer 1814 in automatic writings produced by the medium Mrs Helen Salter in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1814 Scott joined the Commissioners of Northern Lights, the body responsible for inspecting all the lighthouses in Scotland, on an official tour. Parallel words and expressions appeared among the voluminous scripts of Mrs Salter and her mother Margaret Verrall (see *A Sermon in St Paul's* by WH Salter in the *Journal of the SPR* vol.45, 1938-39). Words and phrases turned up in channelled scripts of 11 and 12 September 1911, and one in a later script dated 18 June 1915, the references being later traced to Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, vol.III, pp.136-277. More recently, in 2017, psychologist and conjuror Professor Richard Wiseman hosted a series of Walter Scott themed séances intended as a "fun history, mystery and magic show" at Sygnet Library in Edinburgh, using a copy of the *Letters* as one of the props. In an interview with the *Wee Review*, Prof Wiseman stated: "If I am able to channel his spirit, I would be delighted to dash off another couple of novels and a few poems", but it is pretty certain he was speaking tongue in cheek (15 June 2017).



# JAMIE MOLLART KINGS OF A DEAD WORLD

THE EARTH'S RESOURCES ARE DWINDLING. THE SOLUTION IS THE SLEEP.

INSIDE A HIBERNATING CITY, BEN STRUGGLES WITH HIS LIMITED WAKING TIME AND THE DISEASE STEALING HIS WIFE FROM HIM. WATCHING OVER THE SLEEPERS, LONELY PERUZZI CRAVES THE FAMILY HE NEVER KNEW.

EVERYWHERE, DISSATISFACTION IS GROWING.

THE CITY IS ABOUT TO WAKE.



'THIS IS A FRIGHTENING, THOUGHTFUL VISION EXPLORING WHERE POWER LIES WHEN EVEN THE ACT OF BEING AWAKE IS REVOLUTIONARY'.

**ALIYA WHITELEY**, SHORTLISTED FOR THE ARTHUR C. CLARKE AWARD

'I WOULD LIKE TO SEE *KINGS OF A DEAD WORLD* MADE INTO A "CLI-FI" FILM, MARKED AS BOTH A CAUTIONARY TALE AND SATIRE'.

**JULIET BLAXLAND**, SHORTLISTED FOR THE WAINWRIGHT PRIZE

'A HAUNTING VISION OF THE NEAR-FUTURE WITH EXPERT WORLD-BUILDING AND RICH COMPLEX CHARACTERS, *KINGS OF A DEAD WORLD* KEPT ME GRIPPED FROM BEGINNING TO END'.

**TEMI OH**, WINNER OF THE ALEX AWARD

'MOLLART'S INTRIGUING AND TIMELY PREMISE IS EXECUTED WITH VERVE - *KINGS OF A DEAD WORLD* IS FILMIC IN ITS SCOPE'.

**ALISON MOORE**, SHORTLISTED FOR THE MAN BOOKER PRIZE

'*KINGS OF A DEAD WORLD* INTRIGUED ME WITH ITS TITLE AND HAD ME ON PAGE ONE. MOLLART'S DYSTOPIAN VISION IS AS DISTURBING AS IT IS BRILLIANT'.

**GILES KRISTIAN**, SUNDAY TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *LANCELOT*

**AVAILABLE NOW**  
ON AMAZON, WATERSTONES AND ALL GOOD BOOKSHOPS

# THE CONSPIRASPHERE

Why is it that some denizens of the Conspirasphere have to ruin a perfectly good conspiracy theory by resorting to anti-Semitism, asks **NOEL ROONEY**

## FUNNY PECULIAR

The vexed issue of anti-Semitism has haunted the Conspirasphere for an unconscionably long time. It's an issue I have found hard to reconcile and engage with as I have trawled through the history and ecology of conspiracy theory; perhaps because so little of the grand narrative actually depends on the idea of an international Jewish conspiracy to bolster its aims.

The original grand narratives (Robison, Barruel) did not concern themselves with anti-Semitism; the targets of their theories were the secret societies: the Bavarian Illuminati, the Jacobins and, subsequently (and perhaps paradoxically, as Barruel was himself a Jesuit) the Jesuits and the Freemasons. In fact, the first stirrings of theories linking the ills of the world to the influence of Jewish people came from the Establishment, and it was not until the early 20th century, and the work of writers such as Nesta Webster – that very English Rose allegedly much admired by eminent Britons including Winston Churchill – that Jews, mainly in the guise of evil international bankers, became grist for the canonical conspiracist mill.

One could argue that the insinuation of anti-Semitism into classic conspiracy theory is evidence of conspiracy theory's ultimate dependence on certain streams of Establishment thought for its evolution. Which in turn is an argument for the meta-conspiracy theory that all conspiracy theory is actually a tool of the elite designed to undermine dissent by making it appear ridiculous to the majority population (the sheep laughing at the asses, one might say).

Why am I bringing this up now? Two recent conspiracy stories caught my attention;



## Comedians are being wheeled out to promote climate change

both are interesting in many respects, but both employ a theme of anti-Semitism that, to my mind at least, adds nothing to their premise, except to act as a dog whistle to attract readers of a certain bent to the narrative at hand.

The first is a story about comedians on late-night US TV. Apparently, a bunch of the nation's favourite comics are going to produce special programmes, promoting climate change theory by using the vehicle of comedy, to coincide with the upcoming international conference on the issue, COP 26. Now, it should come as no surprise to readers that climate change is widely viewed in the C-sphere as an elaborate hoax, instigated by the Club of Rome in 1973, and rolled out as a way to both unite and control public opinion by introducing a global threat to humanity, one which requires a global solution, thus allowing the ultimate goal of globalism – one-world government – to come to the rescue.

So the idea that the Deep

State is employing popular comedians to push the climate change agenda has a kind of logic to it, especially if you are, as the article puts it, an "advanced student of NWO [New World Order] Conspiracy analysis"; a group of comedians already known for mocking icons of the right, like Donald Trump, and for making jokes about conspiracy theorists, will be wheeled out to promote the climate change conspiracy, presumably by similarly mocking any and all dissenting opinion – the 'deniers' (an eerily resonant term). And there is a certain logic to claiming that this is not a spontaneous environmentalist effort by America's funny people to persuade Boobus Normie (a taxonomical tag for the conformist couch potato) that climate change is apocalyptically real and about to kill us all, but an insidious Deep State ploy to make the end of the world into the punchline of a very particular species of gallows humour.

The initiative is, according to the article, being co-ordinated by Steve Bodow (pictured above), a long-time producer and writer for the *Daily Show*, first with Jon Stewart and then with Trevor Noah, before moving on to greater things (that is, Netflix). And Steve Bodow is Jewish. Ergo, the entire thing is a Jewish-Zionist plot (the Deep State rather fades into the murky background at this point).

The second story is a corker, on the face of it. It alleges that bio-technology, and the technology of mass surveillance, are the brainchildren of the Secret Elite, the very real secret society set up by Cecil Rhodes and Alfred Milner to advance the interests of the British Empire (that is, to take over the world) and which some historians claim induced Britain to manipulate the great

European powers into starting World War I. It traces a chain of development from the very beginnings of the Secret elite, in the late nineteenth century, to the present day, and the looming threat of global Big Brother.

So far, so intriguing. But it then goes on to make rather a lot of the fact that some of the early pioneers of the technology were Jewish, and that Rhodes and Milner were funded (in part at least) by the Rothschilds. So a story that begins as a tale of the infamy of British imperialism, personified by the likes of Rhodes, and how it still secretly rules the world, morphs into a rant about some powerful, or clever, or influential people being Jewish. At this point, the story completely deflates; from being a classic piece of grand narrative conspiracy theory, it descends into gurning on about how some Jewish people are or were powerful, and how this is obviously some kind of historical deviation.

What strikes me about both stories is that the resort to anti-Semitism both undermines their argument and narrows their potential readership. Thousands of avid conspiracists who are all too eager to see the telescopic arms of the Deep State everywhere, including the world of comedy, will balk at the now terminally tired idea that all conspiracy theories are theories about the Jews. I wish I could provide you with some glib sliver of philosophy that explains this odious phenomenon but I can't; it confounds me.

## SOURCES

[www.realitychan.com/any/09172021.html](http://www.realitychan.com/any/09172021.html); <https://aim4truth.org/2020/06/10/how-the-rothschilds-use-mass-surveillance-and-nanotech-bioweapons-surveillance-and-nanotech-bioweapons-to-sustain-the-imperial-british-world-order/>





## SATAN PLACE

Washington exorcist fights tech-savvy demons, Spanish bishop possessed by love, and the Satanic Temple's 'sacramental' abortions

### TEXTING DEMONS

Catholic priest Monsignor Stephen Rossetti, 70, who claims to carry out up to 20 exorcisms a week in the Washington DC diocese, says that demons have now worked out how to send text messages to taunt people they have possessed, their families and priests attempting to exorcise them. He said: "We have had three cases in which demons have texted the team and or the family of the possessed person... Two of these cases were the most difficult cases we have had so far, and the third involved a pious family with priestly and religious vocations among the children." According to Rossetti, all these cases involved "high value" targets and involved powerful senior demons. One message read "Her torments start now, priest... all night. We will make her bleed", while another said, "We're glad she's away from you now".

Rossetti says that while texting is a recent development, demons have a long history of interfering with technology, disrupting televisions and making lights flicker. He believes that demonic possessions have grown exponentially over the last 10 years and that the situation is getting steadily worse. There is no evidence that demons have got as far as having Instagram accounts, though. *D.Star*, 4 July 2021, 21 Sept 2021.

### THE LAST TEMPTATION OF FATHER NOVELL

Xavier Novell, who in 2010, at the age of 41, became Spain's youngest Catholic bishop, was seen as a rising star in the Church. As a result, his resignation with the Vatican's approval in August caused some surprise. Novell, who was well known for his role as an exorcist and his support for "conversion therapy" for gay people, as well as for Catalan independence, cited "personal reasons" but did not give details.

However, the Spanish website Religión Digital discovered that he had left the Church as he was in a relationship with Silvia Caballó, a psychologist and erotic novelist best known for Satanically tinged titles such as



*The Hell of Gabriel's Lust*. Caballó is described by her publishers as a "dynamic and transgressive author [who] turns upside down our ideas of morality and ethics," while the blurb for one book promises the reader "a journey into sadism, madness and lust and a struggle between good and evil, God and Satan with a plot to shake one's values and religious beliefs."

Novell had practised exorcisms for several years, and apparently it was his desire to study demonology that led him to meet and then become close to Caballó. Church colleagues said they believed he had been possessed by demons, with one saying this was "not a problem of celibacy but rather of infestation." Church sources also claimed that Pope Francis himself had urged Novell to undergo an exorcism to free his troubled spirit, but Novell had

refused to do so. The ex-bishop, who is apparently looking for a job as an agronomist in the Barcelona area, is quoted as saying: "I have fallen in love and want to do things properly." *BBC News*, *D. Telegraph*, 7 Sept 2021.

### SATANIC TEMPLE VERSUS TEXAS

Texas's new abortion legislation, banning the procedure from six weeks after conception, which is before most pregnancies are detected, and allowing individuals to sue anyone who they believe has had an abortion after that, or even anyone who assisted someone to have one, has met with widespread opposition. The Salem-based Satanic Temple, an official, tax-exempt religion (see FT331:4, 383:42-

LEFT: Monsignor Stephen Rossetti believes demons are sending text messages to their victims. BELOW LEFT: Xavier Novell resigned as Spain's youngest Catholic bishop – was he possessed? BELOW: Lucien Greaves, co-founder of the Satanic Temple.

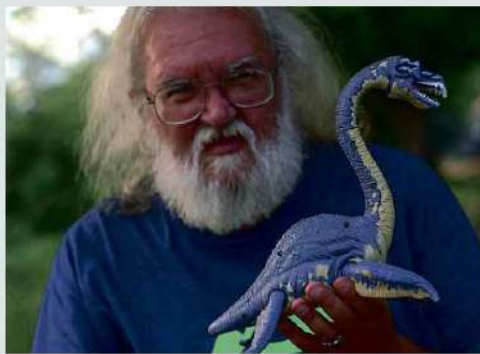
43), has claimed its members qualify for an exemption to the law as a faith-based organisation. Citing the federal Religious Freedom Restoration Act that allows Native Americans to use peyote for religious rituals, the Temple filed a legal letter with the Food and Drug Administration that claims its members should have access to abortion medication up to 24 weeks into a pregnancy for religious purposes. Their letter says "TST's membership uses these products in a sacramental setting... Abortion Ritual is a sacrament which surrounds and includes the abortive act." The Satanic Temple's co-founder Lucien Greaves issued a statement saying: "I am sure Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton – who famously spends a good deal of his time composing press releases about Religious Liberty issues in other states – will be proud to see that Texas's robust Religious Liberty laws, which he so vociferously champions, will prevent future Abortion Rituals from being interrupted by superfluous government restrictions meant only to shame and harass those seeking an abortion."

The Temple, which is not connected to the similarly-inclined Church of Satan, claims to be "resolutely non-theistic" and "does not endorse supernatural (or 'supernormal') explanations". On its website it states that its mission is "to encourage benevolence and empathy, reject tyrannical authority, advocate practical common sense, oppose injustice, and undertake noble pursuits." *EastAnglo.com*, 7 Sept 2021.





## KARL SHUKER mourns two major figures in cryptozoology who were both longstanding friends



ABOVE LEFT: Champ researcher Scott Mardis holding a plesiosaur model. ABOVE RIGHT: Pioneering cheetah researchers Lena and Paul Bottriell.

### SCOTT MARDIS

On 30 July 2021, I learned from his brother Jesse, via Facebook friend and Lake Champlain monster researcher Katy Elizabeth, that fellow Champ researcher and Facebook friend Scott Mardis had passed away on 28 July, following surgery to an infected leg. He was 57. Scott was based in Florida, but he and I had been friends on Facebook for many years, and he had kindly made much lake monster and plesiosaur information available to me during my preparation of various writings over the past decade. God speed, Scott, RIP, and may you now know the truths regarding Champ and all of the many other cryptids that we discussed, and which the rest of us still seek. [www.cryptozoonews.com/mardis-obit/](http://www.cryptozoonews.com/mardis-obit/)

### PAUL BOTTRIELL

On 18 August, I received word from Lena Godsall Bottriell that her husband Paul had passed away on 12 May. Lena and Paul were, and have remained, pioneering king cheetah researchers and have long been friends of mine; in 1989 they kindly wrote the foreword to my first book, *Mystery Cats of the World*. During his life in Africa, Paul confronted and survived all manner of hostile wildlife and humans alike, yet tragically and almost inconceivably was taken by complications resulting from a wasp sting received in December 2019. RIP Paul, you were an indomitable force of nature, a personification of the magnificent wildlife and vistas of Africa that imbued you and Lena with so much

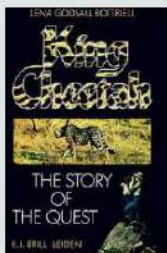
joy and passion. May your spirit now be forever part of that vibrant world you loved so much. A GoFundMe fundraiser has been set up by Fiona Godsall to preserve the monumental king cheetah legacy established by Lena and Paul in relation to this fascinating, exquisitely beautiful cat. If you would like to learn more and/or make a donation to this eminently worthy cause, please visit it via the link provided below. *Lena Godsall Bottriell, pers. comms 18 Aug 2021; www.gofundme.com/f/help-lena-and-paul-in-the-uk*

### GIANT BIRD-EATING TORTOISE!

I have documented a number of startling cases featuring typically herbivorous creatures viciously resorting to bloodthirsty carnivory. These include red deer and feral sheep on certain Scottish Isles decapitating or dismembering and then consuming sea bird chicks; a zoo elephant that killed and largely consumed a visitor; a gruesome zoo giraffe that delighted in stamping upon and then eating sparrows that flew into his enclosure; vampirish Galapagos finches that have become accustomed to using their sharp beaks to wound gannet-like seabirds called boobies before drinking their blood; and bamboo-eating giant pandas that will also kill and consume small rodents and pikas (tiny rabbit-related mammals) if they are sluggish enough to be seized. Now a new exceedingly unexpected slaughterer is added to this grim category – namely, the Seychelles giant tortoise *Aldabrachelys gigantea*. In a quite horrific video shot on 30

July 2020 by Anna Zora, conservation manager of the Seychelles island of Frigate's wildlife sanctuary, and currently attracting international media interest, one of these normally passive, vegetarian behemoths of the reptile world was filmed not merely stalking a young noddie (a tern-related seabird) that had fallen from its nest in the trees onto the ground below but also forcing it to move along a log to the end – from where there was no escape. This is because the noddie chick was both too young to fly and unaccustomed to terrestrial activity. So it was unaware that it actually possessed the walking ability to readily elude its lumbering pursuer. Instead, the hapless chick simply froze, enabling the mighty tortoise to seize its head, killing it, and then swallow the chick whole.

This is the first fully documented case of any tortoise species deliberately attacking and consuming another animal. With the previous examples given above, the usual explanation for these diverse killers' ostensibly aberrant, abhorrent behaviour is that their prey's bones constitute a valuable source of calcium. So maybe that explains this particular tortoise's action too, especially as there are anecdotal reports of other Seychelles giant tortoises behaving in this way. Perhaps we should not be overly surprised, however – after all, pet tortoises apparently greatly relish meat if fed it by their owners. [www.sciencenews.org/article/giant-tortoise-video-hunting-killing-eating-baby-bird](http://www.sciencenews.org/article/giant-tortoise-video-hunting-killing-eating-baby-bird) 23 Aug 2021; [www.cell.com/action/showPdf?pii=S0960-9822%2821%2900917-9](http://www.cell.com/action/showPdf?pii=S0960-9822%2821%2900917-9) 23 Aug 2021; <http://karlshuker.blogspot.com/2014/02/bird-eating-deer-and-flesh-eating-sheep.html>







# MONKEY BUSINESS

Hungry monkeys run riot, female macaque breaks the glass ceiling, and a strange legend from Kesey country

## MONKEY RIOT

In Lopburi, Thailand, the city centre was brought to a standstill by a massive brawl between rival troops of crab-eating macaques, an unexpected side effect of the Covid pandemic. The monkeys live in large groups both on the streets and in the city's temple complexes and are usually affixed by tourists visiting the city. With Covid drastically reducing tourist numbers, the monkeys have been feeling the pinch. The riot began when monkeys from the Phra Prang Sam Yot temple complex ventured out into the streets in search of food. When one of the temple monkeys picked up an empty yogurt carton, it attracted the ire of the street monkeys, who saw it as an intruder onto their territory, and fell upon the "invaders". This precipitated a vicious brawl involving tens of monkeys that lasted nearly five minutes, brought one of Lopburi's busiest intersections to a standstill and left many monkeys on both sides injured and bleeding. Vet Supakarn Kaewchot said, "They are so used to tourists feeding them, with tourists gone they're more aggressive. They're invading buildings and forcing people to flee their homes." *Sun*, 27 July 2021.

## ALPHA FEMALE

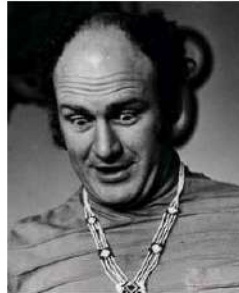
For the first time in the 70 years that biologists have been monitoring a 677-strong troop of Japanese macaques in the Takasakyama natural zoological garden in Oita city on the island of Kyushu, a female has become their leader, something almost never seen among primates. Nine-year-old Yakei first became the alpha female in the troop in April, deposing her own mother, then in June she took on Sanchu, the 31-year-old male who was then head of the troop and successfully beat him up to take over as the troop's boss monkey. Wardens tested her status with a "peanut test" where they put out nuts and saw who was the first to eat them: Sanchu backed off and allowed Yakei to take the



first one, confirming her status. Since becoming leader, she has been walking round with her tail up and climbing trees to shake them, both expressions of power rarely seen in female macaques. *guardian.com*, 9 Aug 2021.

## "THE SHAVED"

Since the 1960s there have been persistent rumours of feral monkeys living in the woods around La Honda, California. Today, La Honda is a quiet countryside community, but in the 1960s it was home to Ken Kesey and the site of the acid tests that Tom Wolfe wrote about in *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, involving Kesey, the Merry Pranksters, Hell's Angels, The Grateful Dead, Hunter S Thompson, Allen Ginsberg and others. Investigating the rumours, journalist Rae Alexander spoke to locals who, while preferring to remain



anonymous, confirmed that in the 1980s sightings of monkeys were so common that they had their own nickname "The Shaved", so called because they all seemed to have mangy bald patches. One resident said "[People] were finding them in their driveways, they were finding them dead. And these monkeys are living off people's garbage. I heard they were friendly to humans. Some people would feed the monkeys and leave food out for them." The origin of the creatures is rumoured to be Stanford University, which, in the early 1960s was a focus of government-funded research into hallucinogens and where one of the key researchers (or possibly lab technicians) was a La Honda resident named Bill Maquis. Maquis who, in later years, was universally known as "Monkey Bill" by the locals,

LEFT: A pre-Covid Monkey Buffet Festival in Lopburi, Thailand. BELOW LEFT: Yakei, the new female leader of her Japanese troop. BELOW RIGHT: Prankster Ken Kesey. Were tripping monkeys really part of the scene at La Honda?

was allegedly responsible for carrying out hallucinogen research on monkeys, although he apparently never gave them anything he didn't try himself. For this purpose, he was supposed to have kept "25 to 35" primates caged in his La Honda backyard. When, later in the decade, the government pulled research funds, the monkeys were scheduled to be euthanised, but local rumour has it that Monkey Bill, along with Kesey and some of the Pranksters, released the primates into the wild while tripping.

Documentary footage unearthed by Alexander shows an exceedingly fried-looking Monkey Bill confirming he kept primates on his premises, but only five or six, and that it was later, between 1974 and 76, when he used them for testing samples sent to him by the Drug Enforcement Agency, saying, "[The monkeys] would get very still on the psychedelic drugs. Higher doses, their eyes would dart back and forth." He doesn't reveal their ultimate fate, though. Maquis and Kesey are now dead, so it has proved impossible to verify the rumours directly, but ex-Merry Prankster Ken Babbs says: "The story about Kesey's involvement with the LSD test monkeys is a bunch of bullshit. That was some guy down the coast. Kesey was not involved with releasing them into the wilds of La Honda." There are still occasional monkey sightings in La Honda, so it remains possible that there might be some substance to the story. If The Shaved are still living in the California hills, though, they would have to be offspring of the original monkeys, given that more than 50 years have now passed. *Kqed.com*, 22 Sep; *detroitbookfest.com*, 4 Dec 2020.

## FORTEAN FOLLOW-UPS

Hero rat retires, killer historian sentenced, and the US grapples with Havana Syndrome

### HERO RAT [FT400:10]

Magawa, the African giant pouched rat who last September was awarded the PDSA Gold Medal – sometimes described as the George Cross for animals – for his “life-saving devotion to duty”, has retired at the age of seven. Malen, his handler, said the rat was “slowing down” with age and she wants to “respect his needs”. Magawa was part of an initiative by the Belgian charity Apopo to train the animals, known as HeroRATS, to detect landmines. In his five-year career Magawa sniffed out 71 landmines and many other unexploded munitions in Cambodia. Malen said: “Magawa’s performance has been unbeaten, and I have been proud to work side by side with him.” The rat will remain with the charity for a few more weeks to “mentor” new recruits and help them settle in. *BBC News*, 4 June 2021.



ABOVE: Magawa, the African giant pouched rat who was awarded the PDSA Gold Medal for his work detecting landmines, is seen here with his handler, Malen.

### HAVANA SYNDROME

[FT359:22, 360:14, 363:4, 370:26-27, 382:10-11, 389:26-27, 401:9, 407:21]

Since 2016 US and Canadian diplomats and other staff at Embassies have been reporting bizarre and long-lasting health problems including dizziness, loss of balance, hearing loss, anxiety and “cognitive fog”. Initially reported by US diplomats in Cuba in 2016, the phenomenon has also been experienced by US officials in China and Russia, with isolated incidents reported as occurring in the US itself as well as London, Colombia, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.

Now more than 20 US staff in Vienna, Austria, have reported being affected by similar problems, with the *New Yorker* magazine reporting that

Vienna is “the new hot spot” for Havana Syndrome, as the affliction has been dubbed. The US State Department are apparently taking the claims of the victims seriously and are “vigorously investigating” as Vienna now has more reported cases of the syndrome than anywhere apart from the initial outbreak in Havana. The Austrian foreign ministry also says it is “working with the US authorities on jointly getting to the bottom of this”.

The US has a large diplomatic presence in Vienna, including one of the world’s largest CIA stations, and the city has always been a centre for international diplomacy. Austria has long tolerated espionage operations by other countries as well, as long as they don’t threaten Austrian interests. It is currently hosting

indirect talks between the US and Iran about getting the 2015 nuclear agreement back on track.

Despite this new cluster, US authorities remain no closer to determining the cause of Havana Syndrome. While it has been seen in some quarters as a mass hysteria event, notably by the FBI, the US Government believes it is the result of an unknown aggressor using an unidentified weapon. Their working hypothesis is that Russian military intelligence operatives have been aiming microwave radiation devices at US officials, possibly to steal data from their computers or smartphones, and have caused physical harm to the people they targeted as a side effect. Some microwave experts do not feel this is likely due to the size of the device that would

be needed and the problems of signal attenuation over distance, particularly when there are obstacles like walls in the way, and others have suggested sonic weaponry as another possibility.

While it may be some time before we have any clear idea of what is behind Havana Syndrome, the US Government appears to be taking the matter seriously. In December 2020, the CIA announced a focused investigation into the phenomenon, something that its new director, Williams Burns, confirmed this March, although no timeline for its work has yet been given. In June, the Senate passed the bipartisan Helping American Victims Afflicted by Neurological Attacks (HAVANA) Act, which provides additional financial and medical resources for American officials suffering with symptoms. *New Yorker*, 16 July; *BBC News*, 18 July; *nymag.com*, 24 Aug 2021.

### O LUCKY (UNLUCKY) MAN! [FT309:4-5]



Erwin Tumiri was one of just six people to survive a plane crash on 28 November 2016 near Medellín,

Colombia, that killed 71 of the 77 people on board, including 19 players from the Brazilian Chapecoense football team. Tumiri was one of the crew on the LaMia Flight 2933. The only survivors besides Tumiri were three Chapecoense players and two other passengers.

On 2 March 2021, Tumiri, now 30, cheated death for a second time after a packed coach tumbled 500ft (150m) down an embankment near the Bolivian city of Cochabamba, killing 21 passengers and injuring more than 30. Tumiri escaped with knee injuries and scratches. “I was listening to music on my mobile phone when I heard people screaming,” he said



from Arebalo Hospital in Cochabamba. "I felt the coach was going to overturn, and it did. The only thing I could do was hold onto the seat in front of me. I remained conscious and managed to crawl out when the vehicle came to a halt." *Metro*, 4 Mar 2021.

## MALIAN NONUPLETS [FT408:9]



Halima Cissé's record for the most surviving children delivered at a single birth, set in May when she gave birth to nine living children, looked to be short-lived when news broke in early June of a South African woman giving birth to 10 children, all of whom had survived. Gosame Thamara Sithole, 37, was reported to have delivered the 10 babies in a Pretoria hospital on 7 June, 29 weeks into her pregnancy, five naturally and five by caesarean section. Apparently, this was a surprise to everyone, as scans had shown only eight babies in the womb. "It's seven boys and three girls. I am happy. I am emotional. I can't talk much," Sithole's boyfriend, Teboho Tsotetsi, told *Pretoria News* after the birth. The BBC said one African official had confirmed the births to them, but another said they were yet to see the babies. A week later, though, on 14 June, the South African Government was still trying to verify the claim. Relatives and neighbours insisted it was true, but a local government department said it had no record of the babies' birth at any of the province's hospitals. The story, however, had gripped the nation and the couple were sent many donations to help them cope, including £50,000 from a single organisation.

The mystery deepened on 16 June when the family of Teboho Tsotetsi issued a statement saying that he had not actually seen the babies and had relied on a call from Sithole to tell him of the birth.

He also said that he had made several attempts to visit her in hospital but had been unable to do so because she had not disclosed where she was or what condition the babies were in, leading them to conclude that the children did not exist. They also reported Sithole to the police as missing. The South African organisation Independent Media continued to insist the births were real and that there had been a "cover-up of mammoth proportions" to conceal medical negligence, but also conceded that they had not seen the children either and did not know where they were. South Africa's National Department of Health's own investigation concluded that there was no evidence the children existed, and confirmed that there was no record of their delivery in any of the public health facilities in the region – indeed, there seemed to be no evidence that Sithole had actually been pregnant at all, despite photos showing her with an enormously swollen belly.

On 17 June, police following up on the missing person report found Sithole at a relative's house in Rabie Ridge near Johannesburg, without the infants, and took her in for psychiatric assessment, after which she was admitted to Tembisa Hospital's psychiatric ward. Via her lawyer Sithole complained she was being held against her will and accused Tsotetsi's relatives of trying to appropriate donations from the public meant for the newborns, despite their claims that the children did not exist. So far, however, no one has been able to produce the mysterious decuplets and it is unclear what exactly has happened to all the donations. In Morocco, though, Halima Cissé's nine children continue to do well, breathing unaided and gaining weight. *Africa.cgtn.com*, 3 June; *BBC News*, 9 June; *dailysabah.com*, 13 June; *aa.com.tr*, 16 June; *mirror.co.uk*, 21 June; *inews.co.uk*, 21 June 2021.

## CROYDON CAT KILLER [FT341:4, 373:18-20, 377:23]



After four years of investigation and over £130,000 spent, in 2018 Croydon police concluded that an alleged serial cat killer who locals feared was preying on their pets did not exist and that the deaths were the result of mundane causes such as road accidents and foxes. In Brighton, when cats started dying or limping home gravely injured, it was a different story. Tina Randall found her 11-year-old cat Gideon bleeding from a serious injury in November 2018. "He was fading," she said. "I immediately thought it was a stab wound." Fortunately, Gideon recovered after emergency veterinary treatment, but other cats named Hendrix, Tommy, Hannah, Alan, Nancy, Gizmo, Kyo, Ollie and Cosmo were not so lucky. Sussex Police failed to make headway in identifying the killer until a CCTV system belonging to the owner of one of the cats who had been killed caught a new attack on camera. This allowed police to identify 54-year-old Steven Bouquet, a security guard, as the culprit and on arrest he was found

with pictures of two of the cats he had killed on his phone. In all he had stabbed at least 16 cats in Brighton between October 2018 and June 2019, killing nine and injuring seven, and in June 2021 he was found guilty of 16 counts of criminal damage and possession of a knife. *BBC News*, 30 June 2021.

## 'NAPOLEON' DISMEMBERS LOVER [FT387:4]



Eminent Russian historian Oleg Sokolov, a Napoleon specialist who taught history at St Petersburg State University and had been awarded France's Legion d'Honneur in 2003, was arrested in November 2019 after being hauled out of the Moika River in St Petersburg, drunk. On his arrest the backpack he was carrying was found to contain a woman's arms. Sokolov, 64, admitted that these belonged to his former student and lover Anastasia Yeschenko, 24, whom he had murdered "in the heat of the moment" and dismembered. In December 2020 Sokolov was sentenced to 12 years and six months in a strict regime penal colony for murder and illegal possession of firearms. *S.Telegraph*, 27 Dec 2020.



ABOVE: Russian historian Oleg Sokolov, accused of murdering and dismembering his former student lover, during his verdict hearing in Saint Petersburg last year.





## STRANGE CONTINENT

ULRICH MAGIN rounds up the latest weirdness from Europe, including a summer of extreme weather

### A SONG OF ICE AND FIRE

Europe suffered from catastrophic weather in an unprecedented way this summer. First came heavy downpours on 4 June, in Hennef, Germany, which I personally lived through: it rained so hard that underground crossings for cars were flooded, and some roads between villages were completely washed away. On 24 June 2021, it hailed so much that glaciers made up of fast-moving layers of egg-sized hail rushed through the flooded streets of Tübingen, also in Germany. Five people were seriously injured in the region and Stuttgart airport had to close. Houses were also inundated in Munich, Frankfurt, and the regions along the Rhine. In the Czech Republic, 50,000 homes were without electricity, and a house at Plze burned down after being hit by lightning. *www.welt.de*, 24 June 2021.

Also on 24 June, a tornado with wind speeds of 300-400 km/h (186-249mph) made mincemeat out of seven villages in the south-eastern Czech Republic. "It sounded as if a train were speeding towards my house," one villager said. "All hell broke loose, with everything up in the air around me." All the window panes of historic Castle Valtice were smashed, and the village of Hrusky was completely obliterated. Five people were killed, 150 injured, and the path of destruction was more than 25km (15 miles) long. *www.tagesschau.de*, 25 June; *Kölnar Stadt-Anzeiger*, 26 June 2021.

Yet the worst was still to come. On 14 July, it rained so hard and long in northern Rhineland-Palatinate and southern Northrhine-Westphalia, that small rivers grew to the size of the Amazon, washing away whole historic villages. Most will have seen



TOP: Rivers of giant hailstones ran through the streets of Tübingen in Germany. ABOVE: Forest fires rage on the island of Euboea in Greece in August.

the damage done in the Ahr Valley, and at Ertstadt, where parts of the town were swept into a gravel pit. On 3 August, the death toll stood at 139, with 26 people still missing. It will take years to repair the damage – whole sections of motorway were washed away, 4,000 cars were completely wrecked, and 29,000 damaged houses were reported to insurance companies. *Kölnar Stadt-Anzeiger*, 30 + 31 July, 13 Aug 2021.

Heavy rains led to massive mud slides in northern Italy. On 27 July, a landslide at Lake Como destroyed parts of the villages of Brieno and Laglio and turned the lake brown. A rain of large hailstones came down in the Val d'Intelvi, and a day after that, a fall of egg-sized hailstones smashed the windshields of cars on the motorway at

Parma, Italy, stopping traffic. Then the fires started around the Mediterranean, where temperatures were boiling hot and it had not rained for months. At least 63 large forest fires were reported in the regions of Antalya, Mersin, Alanya and Marmaris in Turkey. Hotels had to be evacuated; large areas of forest were consumed by the flames. Fires also raged around Palermo, Sicily, on Sardinia, and in Greece, where whole parts of the island of Euboea burned down. Temperatures rose to 45° C. Early in August, fires were threatening Athens, with temperatures above 40° C, as well as other parts of Greece, Italy, Croatia and Turkey. Many people have not only lost their homes, but their means of income, as the regions hit in Greece and Turkey are mainly agricultural and it will take

dozens of years for olive trees and resin pines to grow again.

On 12 August, Syracuse in Sicily registered a record temperature of 48.8° C (119.8° F), and fires raged in Calabria and Algeria. It also started to rain, extinguishing the forest fires on the Greek Peloponnese and on Euboea. All in all, 300 houses were destroyed, 100,000ha (247,000 acres) ectares of forest and 46,000ha (114,000 acres) of olive trees on Euboea. In Turkey, 200 fires were now mainly under control while the rain inundated larger areas of the Aegean coast. *Provincia di Como*, 27 July; *heute*, 27 July, 4 Aug; *Tagesschau*, 4 Aug 2021.

### MORE WEIRD WEATHER

Weather was not only wreaking havoc across Europe, but behaving strangely, too. On 19 June, Italian news outlets reported that the snow in the Alps was becoming pink and red. The phenomenon was noted in the French and Italian parts of the mountain range. The snowfields at the Passo del Gran San Bernardo at the Swiss-Italian border turned red, and in July, the whole surface of the Presena glacier at the border of Brescia and Trento provinces turned pink. The phenomenon, which is said to occur regularly in all icy parts of the world, is due to red algae (*Chlamydomonas nivalis*), which grow immensely when temperatures rise over several days. *www.rainews.it*, 19 June; *La Repubblica*, 28 June; *www.quirbscia.it*, 9 July 2021.

And as if the heavens had announced what was to come, Diana Baum, from Erfurt, Germany, took a picture on 28 May 2021 of what she said was "an eye in the sky". It consisted of clouds, and was not really an outstanding simulacrum, but quickly drew comments on Facebook. "He will get us all," remarked one user, while others



wrote that it was “the eye of God” or “an angel watching over us.” [www.thueringen24.de](http://www.thueringen24.de), 30 May 2021.

## ALIEN ANIMALS

The usual run of “escaped” animals also did the rounds. On 7 July, a “small kangaroo” – more likely a wallaby – was observed and photographed at Delmenhorst, near Bremen, Germany. Meanwhile, a shark appeared in a pond near Herzogenaurach, Bavaria, during a live interview on the German TV channel ARD a few minutes before the soccer match between the Netherlands and Czech Republic started. The mystery shark turned out to be only a radio-controlled model fin made by some hoaxers who wanted attention – and got it. *Netzwerk für Kryptozoologie*, 11 July; *web.de*, 27 June 2021.

Panthers were spotted at several places in Italy – first in Apulia, in the south, starting in February. In the Bari region, there were several encounters with a large black cat, and local officials warned people to avoid going for hikes and to stay at home. Photos and at least one video were taken in mid-April near Matino, showing what looks like the back of a black animal moving through tall grass. On 26 April, it was announced that the panther was in fact a harmless serval. The jet-black animal was filmed with a drone by carabinieri following up sighting reports. How the serval reached southern Italy was not explained, although black servals are apparently kept as pets. In July, in Collecchio, Pescara province, some 100 miles (160km) to the north of Bari, several people saw a “cat of large size” along the banks of the river Fino. So far I have not traced any sightings in Spain or Germany where large cats commonly turn up each summer. *La Stampa*, 14 Feb; *La Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno*, 16 Apr; *metronews.it*, 26 Apr; *Colline d'oro*, 30 July 2021.



## CROATIAN CHANGES

Parts of Croatia are becoming Swiss cheese country. Within a month, almost 100 sinkholes appeared in northeast Croatia, mostly around Mecencani and Borjovici. The largest hole, according to press reports, appeared in the garden of Nikola Borjovic on 5 January. Since then, it has grown to three times its initial size and is now 30m (100ft) wide and 15m (50ft) deep. It was linked to a 6.4 magnitude earthquake six days earlier, and most holes appeared within one month of the seismic event. Sinkholes usually form when subterranean chambers collapse, so sinkholes triggered by quakes, while rare, are not unusual. Two formed after the devastating L'Aquila quake in Italy in 2009. The BBC quotes seismologist Josip Stipcevic from the Department of Geophysics at the Faculty of Science in Zagreb, who pointed out that the area is full of active

faults. Yet, “nobody expected the appearance of so many sinkholes”. This also mystified Italian geologist Antonio Santo from the University of Naples Federico II: “The real anomaly in Croatia’s case is a very high number of sinkholes with significant dimension.” Geologists believe that the holes would have formed anyway but that the vibrations of the quake speeded up the process. Bruno Tomljenovic, a geophysicist at Zagreb University, believes the formation of some sinkholes might have led to others. “Also, there is a chance that a few collapsed sinkholes caused additional changes in hydrodynamics, with water searching for new passages and possibly causing more sinkholes.” The hole that formed in Mr Borjovic’s garden has now filled with water. [www.bbc.com](http://www.bbc.com), 5 July 2021.

Back in October 2020, a natural phenomenon turned

LEFT: An “eye in the sky” above Erfurt. BELOW LEFT: The sinkhole in Nikola Borjovic’s back garden.

the water of the so-called Dragon Lake near Rogoznica in Croatia into a badly smelling sludge. The lake, 150m by 70m (500 by 230ft) in size, is only 90m (300ft) from the sea shore, contains salt water and rises and sinks with the tide. Once every four or five years, it suddenly loses all oxygen and all life within it dies off – despite its underground connection to the Mediterranean. The water, usually deep blue and turquoise, turns muddy or grey and starts to stink of rotten eggs as it releases hydrogen sulphide. It first happened in 1997, and most recently in October 2016 and October 2020. On the last occasion, tourists were disappointed. “I had come to see the beautiful colours,” said Marta from Poland, “but this is not nice.” And Sandra from Popovaca said, “I had to come here to see for myself. Nature has had its say here.” The lake was without oxygen for a week. Scientists who have investigated the phenomenon think the answer lies in global warming. The small lake is normally meromictic, that means its layers of water do not mix. In recent years, it has begun to overheat in summer: the warmer water flows more easily into marine water, the temperature layers then mix and all oxygen vanishes. Also, sulphides from the ground are washed into the lake. The hydrogen sulphide then kills all life, which consists mostly of shrimp that live close to the surface. Milan Cankovic of the Institute Ruder Boskovic explains: “The lake regenerates quickly, we are talking about only a few weeks. It may take a month or one and a half. On the other hand, it takes years until the biology has regenerated.” There are only 28 meromictic lakes in Europa. *Sanja Jurišić*, 10 Oct 2020.

DANAI BAUM

AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

## NECROLOG

This month, we salute Avebury's Arch Druid and Keeper of the Stones and wave goodbye to a longstanding promoter of ufology's wilder shores



ABOVE LEFT: Arch Druid Terry Dobney enjoying a quiet pint. ABOVE RIGHT: "Mr UFO" Timothy Green Beckley and an alien friend.

### TERRY DOBNEY

I first met Terry Dobney in 1993: we had a lengthy discussion about the ancient BSA motorbike that he was sitting on outside the pub in Avebury. Born in 1948, Terry grew up in the military town of Aldershot, with parents who had both served in the war. Motorcycles were the great passion of his youth, as he progressed from Teddy Boy, to Rocker, to Hell's Angel. As a 16-year-old engineering apprentice he had a near-fatal motorbike accident; he later joined the Army but was soon discharged because of his prior injuries.

Terry worked with motorcycles throughout his professional life. In the early 1980s he was an ambassador for the Russian Dnepr company, touring the USA with one of their motorbike and sidcar combos and visiting potential dealers. He ran a successful business restoring vintage machines, and for many years was involved with the Isle of Man TT races.

Terry used to say he felt he had "lived 10 lives in one" and was full of tales about his colourful past. In the Sixties he became part of London's counterculture and managed a

band. Later, his growing interest in left wing politics led to a falling out with other Hell's Angels who held racist views. He remained an honorary member until his death, though, conducting many Hell's Angel funerals. Terry's boxing past led to him working as a bodyguard, and he was a minder for Jimi Hendrix, Stevie Wonder, Fleetwood Mac's Christine McVie and others; he spent six months as a roadie for Ozzie Osbourne. Terry was an excellent harmonica player and when working on bikes in Daytona, Florida, he was noticed by a stranger who whisked him off in a car to play a blues club with Muddy Waters.

On a childhood visit with the cub scouts, Terry was told that the Druids were responsible for building Stonehenge and Avebury – this awakened an interest that continued to grow over the years. He returned again and again on a succession of motorbikes, finding himself more drawn to Avebury with each visit. Eventually he bought a thatched cottage close to Avebury that had been occupied by the previous Keeper of the Stones and took on that role. As Arch Druid, Terry regularly performed seasonal ceremonies

and numerous 'hand-fastings' (pagan weddings) inside the great stone circle. In the 1990s no more than a few dozen people would attend – this grew to several thousand for Summer Solstice.

Climbing Silbury Hill is strictly forbidden, for good reason. Terry, however, was granted permission from the National Trust to ascend the 30m (100ft) high mound each Lammas to invoke lightning and fertilise the spring earth. This action was just as rash as it sounds – one year, several witnesses reported that he was actually hit by lightning...

Terry's mobility was greatly impaired by a stroke several years ago, yet his enthusiasm for life and Avebury continued unabated. I recall one Summer Solstice evening in Avebury. We had all heard that Terry was in hospital, but to everyone's great surprise, he turned up in his new wheelchair. Pushed by a helper, he raced full pelt around the circle, doing wheelies all the way. After a huge ovation, he gave his usual address and started the celebrations. In June this year Terry married Susan, his partner of eight years. In August, just a week

before he died, friends helped him to visit an archaeological dig not far from his house.

It is hard to imagine Caer Abiri (as Druids call Avebury) without Terry, who, with his ceremonial tunic and flat cap, seemed to be a permanent fixture. He will be greatly missed.

*Terry Dobney, Arch Druid and Keeper of the Avebury Stones, born Farnham, Surrey, 30 Dec 1948; died West Kennett, Wiltshire, 26 Aug 2021, aged 72.*

Steve Marshall

### TIMOTHY GREEN BECKLEY

Timothy Green Beckley revelled in the wild and weird worlds of the paranormal, ufology and everything else that takes us beyond the strictures of normal existence.

At the age of 14, he bought his own mimeograph machine to publish the *Interplanetary News Service Report* and went on to publish *UFO Universe* and forge a career as a film reviewer for *Hustler* magazine. His knack for words led to him becoming a publicist and promoter for numerous low budget movies, including *Skin Eating Jungle Vampires* and *Blood Sucking Vampire Freaks*, and he wrote the screenplays for *Driller* (1984) and *Sandy Hook Lingerie Party Massacre* (2000). From 1979 to 2004 he acted in 50 movies. He once confessed to me in a Facebook exchange: "I used to write cover lines for small publishers who couldn't think of anything. Some say I am very sensationalistic."

As a UFO magazine and book publisher he was equally prolific. His most recent titles being: *Alien Blood Lust*, *Cosmic Messages from the Space Brothers* and *Ashtar Command*, *UFO Hostilities* and *The Evil Alien Agenda*, *Screwed by the Aliens: True Sexual Encounters with ETs*, *Area 51: Warning Keep Out!* and *Alien Lives Matter: It's OK to be Grey*. As can be seen from their titles, these books were





hardly scientific or academic publications, but they did tap into the interests and concerns of popular ufology (and, I must confess, I contributed to several of these volumes).

Beckley also co-hosted the 'Exploring the Bizarre' podcast with Tim Schwartz on KCOR radio and was a frequent guest on TV and radio. Not surprisingly, his activities gained him the nickname 'Mr UFO' or, in connection with his horror/exploitation movies, 'Mr Creepo'. He was always on the lookout for new or recycled material for book projects to exploit the latest trends. Only a few months ago he circulated this email to his roster of writers:

"Dulce is our most popular book at the moment. Going to take everything we have and put it together in a book **DULCE WARRIORS – EARTH VS THE FLYING SAUCERS**, or evil aliens or something like that.

"If you have anything on critters from the deep send it on over. Should have a tie in with underground bases or some such."

In his later years he suffered ill health, but always remained upbeat. When I reviewed one of his books he emailed:

"I WASN'T SURE WHAT THE WHITE SUBSTANCE WAS ON THE TABLE. . .

"TOO BAD IT'S SALT.  
"OH THANKS FOR THE REVIEW. WILL REPOST IT THIS AFTERNOON AFTER LUNCH WITHOUT SALT – TOO MUCH SODIUM ENDED ME IN THE HOSPITAL TWICE."

Curse those condiments!

In 2018 he messaged me: "Tomorrow I turn 71. But as Alice Cooper says: 'I'm 18 and I like it!'" Now Timothy will always be 18, forever indulging in a sensational afterlife partying with ghosts, aliens, vampires and assorted monstrous critters.

*Timothy Green Beckley, paranormal, UFO and horror film publisher and promoter, born New Brunswick, New Jersey, 13 July 1947; died Manhattan, New York, 31 May 2021, aged 73.*

**Nigel Watson**



## FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

SIMON YOUNG FILES A NEW REPORT FROM THE INTERFACE OF STRANGE PHENOMENA AND FOLK BELIEF

### VERY SCARY FAIRIES

It is perhaps the single scariest British fairy encounter. The year is 1757. Four children are playing in a field in Denbighshire. The children (three girls and a boy) are aged seven, eight, 10 and 15. The experience was recorded by the youngest, Edward Williams (1750-1813). Williams – who would become a celebrated Methodist preacher – wrote two difference accounts: one for the proto-fortean collector Edmund Jones, when Edward was in his early twenties; and the other as an autobiographical reminiscence much later in his life. The two accounts are remarkably similar.

The children were playing in a field outside Bodfari when they became aware that, about 70 yards from them, a group of humanoids were dancing. The account begins jarringly with these figures suddenly turning up out of nowhere. As to the appearance of the interlopers: "They seemed to be little bigger than we, but of a dwarfish appearance." "They were clothed in red all over like soldiers, with red handkerchiefs, sprig'd, and spotted with yellow about their heads, all alike in everything... with the knot behind." Usually, fairies dance in a circle and invite humans in. Here the figures seemed to be involved in manic "morriss dancing" (Jones's words). There was "something uncommonly wild in their motions." The children had real problems

establishing how many there were – which suggests a lot of movement – but decided in the end that there were about 16.

So far so creepy. But things are about to go from deeply weird to unaccountably bad. "Presently we saw one of them coming away from the company in a running pace; upon this we feared and ran to the stile." The kids

were being chased by an angry fairy dancer: he had a "slow running pace", but "with long steps for a little one". The older children heroically went first over the stile and poor Edward was left last. He remembered the order of the girls going over that narrow piece of wood 15 years later: this suggests that the terror burnt the whole sequence into his mind. While "I was creeping up the stile, my sister staying to help me, I looked back, and saw him just by me; upon which I cried out, my sister also cried out, and [she]

"I LOOKED BACK  
AND SAW HIM  
JUST BY ME;  
UPON WHICH I  
CRIED OUT, MY  
SISTER ALSO  
CRIED OUT"

took hold of me under her arm to draw me over; and when my feet had just come over, I still crying and looking back, we saw him reaching after me, leaning on the stile; but [he] did not come over." The man had a "grim countenance, a wild and somewhat fierce look"; his complexion was "copper-coloured".

All four children (now grown) were still alive in 1772 when Edward wrote his first account: "They remember it as well if not better than myself."

Simon has edited *Sheridan Le Fanu's Scary Fairy Tales: Four Tales of Fairy Horror* (2020).



## Seeing and believing

**NIGEL WATSON** surveys the latest sightings and ufological news from around the world

### UFO DREAMS

In her previous column (**FT410:31**) Jenny Randles discussed the importance of dreams in relation to our perception of reality, and how we all live in a bubble universe of our own making. Such thoughts are reinforced in an article by Robert Lanza MD on the *Psychology Today* website. He notes that as we go about our everyday lives we automatically process information from all our senses to create our concept of reality, and this is usually separated from the realm of our nocturnal dreams. According to Lanza, in dreams we effortlessly "turn pure information into a dynamic multidimensional reality." Biocentrism, using the principles of quantum theory, claims that similar processes also go on in our waking lives, but are conditioned by the presence of networks of observers who shape the structure of space and time. Our perceptions are not fixed, but are part of an intricate and vast fabric of information and sensory input.

Our perceptions might change but they are usually shaped by how we register and record reality with our own senses and using instruments and scientific experimentation and theory. In our dreams we can manipulate "reality"; but in waking life you cannot stop a speeding train from killing you, and humans soon learn to negotiate the real world. Yet, even in the fixed world of solid objects and places there arise ambiguities and doubts. UFOs represent an excellent example, as one person might very well perceive a flying saucer or a more fashionable and up-to-date tic-tac, while another might see the same object as a helium balloon or an aircraft. Partly, this might be down to personal expectations and the wider social situation. During a UFO scare, anything unusual in the sky might be interpreted as an alien spacecraft, especially if you are a UFO believer; whereas in different circumstances, say during wartime, an unusual light would be regarded as an enemy aircraft. This all depends on how unusual the perceived characteristics of the light are; but, again, people have different perceptions of size, shape, colour and speed.

Another factor is the circumstances of the sighting. In Jenny's current column

(see opposite page) she explains that a UFO sighting was caused by an helicopter because she watched it longer than a different witness. A similar thing happened to me in (scary) Scunthorpe (see p48) in the 1970s. I was walking along Messingham Road when I saw a Vulcan bomber fly overhead and into the horizon; at that moment the aircraft appeared as if hovering and the Sun reflecting off it gave it a glowing, metallic, saucer-shaped appearance. Anyone who had not seen it flying overhead could

easily have thought it was a classic flying saucer.

Psychoanalyst Carl Jung was probably the first to postulate that there is an interaction between dreams, art, science fiction, films, news reports and stories of UFOs and actual UFO sightings (see **FT264:40-45**). He thought that due to the pressures of the Cold War the human collective consciousness produced through the image of the UFO and visiting aliens a symbol of wholeness and integration. To him, UFOs

were a spontaneous archetypal symbol much like the Mandala symbols of Eastern religions. In his book *Flying Saucers: A Modern Myth of Things Seen in the Skies* he notes:

"The projected image [of a UFO] then appears as an ostensibly physical fact independent of the individual psyche and its nature. In other words, the rounded wholeness of the mandala becomes a space ship controlled by an intelligent being."

*Flying Saucers* was published in 1957, and Jung was something of a pioneer of the psychosocial view of UFOs and the power of our dreams. I wonder what he would make of the UAPs of today...

Robert Lanza MD, "Dreams Are More Real Than Anyone Thought," at: [www.psychologytoday.com/intl/blog/biocentrism/202108/dreams-are-more-real-anyone-thought](http://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/blog/biocentrism/202108/dreams-are-more-real-anyone-thought).

### KEEPING IT REAL

All the excitement over UAPs came and went like a summer

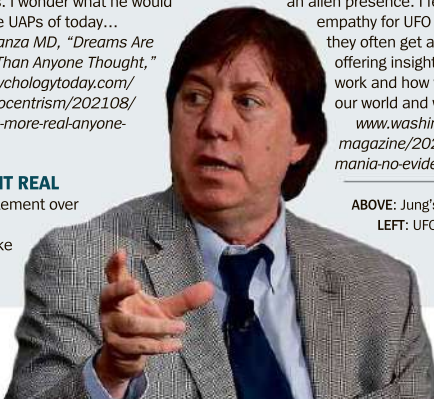
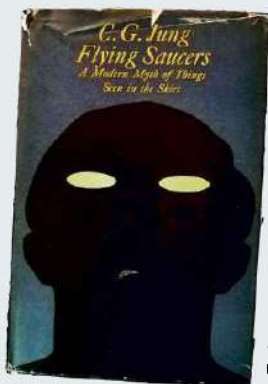
storm. Now, after the hope for disclosure and revelation, more sober minds are coming forward in the media to spoil the party. A typical example is an article "UFO Mania Is Out of Control. Please Stop" by science writer Joel Achenbach in the *Washington Post*. Back in 2003 he wrote *Captured by Aliens* (not to be confused with my own *Captured by Aliens?* book of 2020), which looked at SETI research and included a sceptical examination of the UFO mythology. I can easily agree with him that the sceptical viewpoint is boring – as I once told a podcaster, "believers have more fun" and those who pander to them also attain greater popularity and bigger financial rewards.

"Most UFO narratives are conspiracy theories of sorts. They posit not only the existence of extraterrestrial visitors, but also a conspiracy of silence, obfuscation and intimidation of witnesses by the government, or maybe the news media, private corporations, the globalists, etc. Or even by the aliens who are secretly running everything," he writes. For this reason the alien explanation for UFOs needs a massive infrastructure of assumptions – assumptions that are too slippery to study or explain using current science anyway.

Another factor is the debate over what constitutes evidence to support the ET theory, as Achenbach notes: "What I discovered while reporting my book is that people who believe in ideas that I found extremely improbable were not crazy or uneducated. Nor uninformed. They did research too. They just processed information differently. They had different sources of information. They used different factors and probability estimates in their mental equations as they searched for answers."

Not surprisingly, in the comments section of the online article there are numerous outraged UFO experiencers and those who believe the latest UAP stories indicate an alien presence. I feel considerable empathy for UFO experiencers, as they often get a raw deal despite offering insights into how our minds work and how we interact both with our world and with the otherworldly. [www.washingtonpost.com/magazine/2021/08/11/stop-ufo-mania-no-evidence-of-aliens/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/magazine/2021/08/11/stop-ufo-mania-no-evidence-of-aliens/)

ABOVE: Jung's seminal book on UFOs.  
LEFT: UFO sceptic Joel Achenbach.





# The eye of the beholder

JENNY RANGLES suggests that “seeing” a UFO is about being in the wrong place at the right time

Have you ever seen a UFO? If not, why not – especially if you are interested in these things? That is a question you may never have asked yourself, but I think that you should. It might help us understand what lies behind this baffling phenomenon, because it goes to the heart of what seeing a UFO really means.

My inspiration for this question was the ufologist who first got me interested in the potential relationship between UFOs and science, Jacques Vallée. In one of his many telling insights on the subject, Vallée noted: “Just because a message comes from Heaven doesn’t mean it isn’t stupid.”

A strange thought; but it’s undeniable that we have tended to ‘deify’ the big cases of the UFO mystery and those witnesses who describe the most profound experiences of the phenomenon. Yet they are but a fraction of overall cases. If you ignore 99 per cent of the data, then most scientists will rightly suspect that you are finding what you want to find and not necessarily revealing what is actually there. Remember that UFOs only exist because people see them *and* then think them to be extraordinary. Without perception there is no phenomenon. They exist because we say so. We are architects of our own mystery.

This leads to another question: are we observing what is there, or creating what we see from something else that we *choose to perceive* as extraordinary? I recall one journalist who was interviewing me and wanted to share his own ‘close encounter’. He was driving on the M6 motorway near Wigan. It was rush hour, and the highway was packed. He saw three white lights in a triangular pattern and watched them briefly cross his path; he was amazed. He had just become a UFO witness, and the event impressed itself as a memory he was eager to share. Countless people join the millions-strong ranks of witnesses daily via similar incidents. There is no question that this event became imprinted on his mind for one reason: he *interpreted* it as a UFO, as they were in the news and he had no other obvious life experience to provide a match or an explanation. Yet hundreds of drivers on the same road that day went by, seemingly not observing this same event; or, more correctly, if they did observe it, they did not interpret it in the same way as did this sincerely puzzled observer.

Anyone who has investigated UFOs will be running through possible solutions as to the cause of this ‘unidentified’ (note:

not ‘unidentifiable’) object. A major sighting some years later had a similar cause, so I think I know what this ‘UFO’ was. Maybe others saw it on that road but had seen something like it before; or they knew that aircraft lights can, at a chance moment in time, align to create a visual illusion.

Think ‘plane’, and the case fizzles out as you seek answers, not puzzles. Think ‘UFO’, and your mind sets off in a very different direction. Many close encounters come into being in this manner. It is nobody’s fault – just our love of mysteries and the desire to solve them. “UFO” is a much more interesting outcome than “plane”, so it is no surprise more are tempted on that path than not.

Another day, and in this instance the witness who contacted me was a highly skilled engineer working for the MoD at a base in Hampshire. On 8 June 1982 he had followed his passion for motorbikes to the Isle of Man, where the world-famous TT Races are held each Summer. Observing from Mooragh Park in Ramsey on a lovely sunny day, he spotted a ring-shaped object that slowly drifted by as the crowd focused on other things closer to Earth. He photographed it as it flew away – proof that it was real. To him, it was a baffling event – over in moments – and a classic daylight encounter. I did not witness this event but by chance was elsewhere on the island that day as my partner Paul was a big motorbike fan and we were taking a holiday. The photograph of the UFO was analysed by experts. The object it showed, though faint and small against the sky, was genuine. We estimated it to be an annular object about 30ft (9m) wide. Yet many in the crowd either had not seen it or – perhaps crucially – had not seen it as a UFO. There is a big difference.

This might still be an unsolved case were it not for the fact that around that time Paul and I were nearby and recalled the lovely, hot weather that day as a Pitt Special light aircraft did an aerial display that looped the loop and created a small smoke ring in the sky. Conditions were such that this was very stable and drifted away over the island. It was easy to check where it might have headed. The witness saw this ring, but not the plane that had caused it, which was elsewhere. It was pure chance that I could supply the missing part of the puzzle – otherwise, this UFO would still be a UFO.

Just how many times must this happen?

A UFO is real in the eye of the beholder; it’s not their fault they usually lack sufficient data to resolve it. But that does not mean it *cannot* be resolved. UFOs are a product of being in the right place at the right time; or, indeed, the wrong place – the place where you do not have the missing piece that solves the puzzle.

One final example is my own close encounter in Spring 1978. It was twilight, and Paul and I were walking the dog on Chat Moss, a huge peat bog next to where I then lived in Irlam. Then I saw a UFO; or, to be accurate, a glowing orange ball of light drifting silently and slowly over the moss. Seconds later, it blinked out and vanished. Being interested in UFOs I kept watching the sky – and that’s the only reason I saw what happened next. Had I only viewed the first part, it would have remained a UFO report.

Three days later I opened the door and found a journalist from the *Warrington Guardian* wanting to interview me about the UFO I’d seen. I had told nobody about it, as I knew it was not a UFO (the reporter didn’t know I was a ufologist). A neighbour had seen Paul and I on the Moss watching the event; she had stood in awe in her garden, watching only the first part – the drifting and vanishing ball of light – before hurrying indoors. She had told the press and directed them to me as a “back-up witness”.

Intriguingly, she had perceived not a blob of orange light but a dome-like ‘saucer’ that sped away; now the paper was planning a feature on the Irlam ‘spaceship’. But Paul and I had stayed for the sequel, after the orange blob ‘blinked out’ (not sped away). We then saw red and green navigation lights in the same spot, which climbed up and headed southwards and became audible as a helicopter that was heading back to base. Investigation revealed it was crop spraying at dusk using a searchlight beam turned orange by the air over the moss. It finished its job, switched off the light and returned to base. The end. Or the beginning...

Two entirely different perceptions of the same event, one creating a lifelong memory of a UFO, the other an interesting anecdote that I would have forgotten by now but for my interest in the UFO mystery. UFOs are literally out there every day. If you are observant you will see them. But the real question is how many of them are actually unidentified rather than simply unidentified?





# THE SHORTENING OF THE WAY

With a new *Dune* movie in cinemas and a TV series in the offing, **BOB RICKARD** dons his still-suit and probes the origin of Frank Herbert's protagonists – the *Kwisatz Haderech* – and their mysterious ability to transcend space and time.

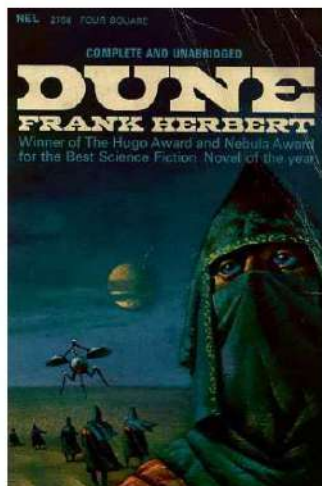
Every other year, I re-read Frank Herbert's *Dune* books<sup>1</sup> because I thoroughly enjoy their richly crafted, imaginative worlds and always find something new in their intelligent writing. Now we also have a fresh film adaptation, this time directed by Denis Villeneuve (reviewed p.66), who is also overseeing a companion TV series *Dune: The Sisterhood*.

The engine of *Dune*'s main story arc – the mysterious process or person Herbert calls *Kwisatz Haderech* – is introduced early on in an encounter between Leto (Duke of House Atreides), his concubine Jessica (mother of the boy-hero Paul) and Liet Kynes (the Imperially-appointed planetologist to the ultra-dry world of Arrakis).<sup>2</sup>

The story of *Dune* begins some 20,000 years into our future and Paul Atreides is no ordinary lad. He is the product of a eugenics programme spanning thousands of years, deliberately selecting for a paranormally gifted leader. This ambitious project is engineered by another of Herbert's memorable creations: the venerable, cultish, female-only organisation known as the *Bene Gesserit* (a name influenced by Latin and Hebrew linguistics). They are an obvious parody of the influential orders of Catholic nuns; Herbert apparently thought of them as “female Jesuits” and modelled them on his “Irish Catholic aunts”.

Despite their considerable talents – gained through rigorous mental and physical training, and the use of the nootropic substance called “spice melange” – the prescience of the “Reverend Mothers” was always limited. They could experience the ‘genetic’ memories of a female lineage but not that of any male line. Indeed, the very thought of accessing the male ‘Other’ memories terrified them.

This inhibition became the impetus for them to breed a male – the *Kwisatz Haderech* – whom they could control; one who could also venture into the hidden region of the future they found blocked to them. He would also have the combined abilities of a Reverend Mother, a “Mentat” (a human computer), and a “Guild Navigator” (the spaceship pilots who used melange to find ideal routes through space).



## HERBERT BASED THE BENE GESSERIT ON HIS IRISH CATHOLIC AUNTS

The reader is left in no doubt about the importance of the *Kwisatz Haderech* and his mysterious ability to “shorten the way”, but the explanation that it relates to a type of visionary teleportation comes much later. A few enterprising readers, however, soon discovered that the famously erudite Herbert had borrowed the phrase *kefitzat haderech* (or *ha-derekh*) – Hebrew: *kefitzat* to jump or clench; *haderech* a path or way – from an ancient Jewish rabbinical tradition and dressed it in futuristic robes. My aim here is to reveal the historical and mystical idea of “shortening the way” and its origins in Hasidic and Islamic mysticism in greater detail. To do that effectively, we need to have some context: a brief portrait of Frank Herbert (1920-1986)<sup>3</sup> and his complex fiction, and a summary of those ancient motifs themselves.

LEFT: Bruce Pennington's iconic cover art for the 1968 New English Library paperback edition of *Dune*. RIGHT: Pascal Blanché's contemporary take.

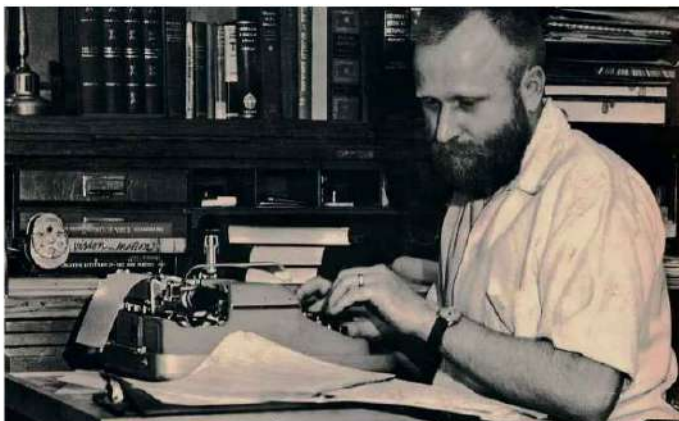
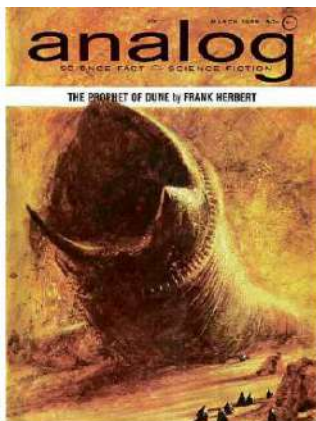
## THE DREAMER OF DUNE

*Dune* enjoys an exalted place in the annals of science fiction. Historically, Herbert's *magnum opus* was one of the first great best-sellers of the genre for good reason. It was the product of a “speculative and passionate intellect,” wrote the editors of the *SF Encyclopedia*, “a novel of extraordinary complexity... [and] intensity of intellectual discourse.”<sup>4</sup> Besides its memorable story, the *Dune* series has appealed to several generations of modern readers specifically because of its futuristic discussion of large-scale environmental issues, sectarian violence, and the rise of both fundamentalist guerrilla armies and anti-authoritarian social action groups. “So completely did Mr Herbert work out the interactions of man and beast and geography and climate,” noted Gerald Jonas, “that *Dune* became the standard for a new sub-genre of ‘ecological’ science fiction.”<sup>5</sup>

For almost every descriptive and plot-related point, Herbert read as deeply and as widely as he could. Readers of *Dune* will be familiar with the way Herbert took words and phrases from significant languages and then tweaked them to suit his plot. Herbert admired Ezra Pound – whose poetry he had discovered in his teens – and followed Pound's advice on literary borrowings: to “make it new”.<sup>6</sup> *Dune* is full of such appropriations; from Arabic, Greek and Hebrew, certainly, but also from Slavic, Meso-American, Latin, Hindu and German among others.

Khalid Baheyeldin, a Canadian software developer, has compiled from *Dune* an extensive list of names, words and phrases that Herbert derived from Arabic.<sup>7</sup> He and others have speculated that Herbert's use of the hypnotic “spice melange” was a metaphor for the global exploitation of oil. It may well have been on Herbert's mind in the early stages of writing, but as he became more engrossed in creating a plausible planetary ecology as the backdrop for his epic tale, his thoughts turned more towards Homer and the Greeks.<sup>8</sup> Only in the form of an SF novel, he realised, could he deal with the timescale





ABOVE LEFT: Herbert's novel first appeared as two serials in *Analog* magazine between 1963 and 1965. ABOVE RIGHT: Frank Herbert at work. BELOW: TE Lawrence, aka 'Lawrence of Arabia', and his part in the Arab Revolt was one early source of inspiration for *Dune*.

he needed for his planet. But where had Herbert's interest in desert ecology come from?

### THE BOOKS OF DUNE

As a young man, Herbert worked in a newspaper office before a stint in the US Navy. In the late-1950s, he moved his family to Washington State, where he learned of a special government project on the Oregon coast, investigating ways to curb the relentless advances of "unstable sand dunes".

As preparation for an article on the project's success, Herbert chartered a flight over the region. The sight of the advancing "ocean of dunes" affected him deeply. He imagined once fertile places now lost, and the civilisations and great religions associated with such merciless landscapes. He had wanted to write a story about desert warfare, and this suited his plan perfectly. He could imagine vividly the people who might live there, and their religion.

According to Brian Herbert, his father "knew comparatively little about the complex ecosystems of deserts but set about a thorough course of personal study." His reading soon brought him to such books as TE Lawrence's 1927 *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, and the histories of native insurgencies against invading Imperialists.<sup>9</sup> He also studied psychology, mythology and mysticism – and even took some psilocybin – to make the spice visions in his saga seem more visceral and realistic.

The nature of religion 3,000 years into the future was particularly important to Herbert. As he did with his planets and their histories, he put considerable effort into imagining how the remnants of today's Catholicism, Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism would integrate and cross-fertilise over millennia. In this regard, Herbert figures among the few SF writers who have imagined the form that orthodox religion might take to still be a significant social force in human societies. He depicted it becoming a tool by

## THE BENE GESSERIT HOPED TO BREED THE SUPERHUMAN 'MESSIAH'



which his Bene Gesserit would manipulate future societies and their theologies.

But the biggest of Herbert's threads in the *Dune* canon is his development of "the reluctant but inevitable evolution of its protagonist into a Messiah," as the editors of the *SF Encyclopedia* put it, making it "the most elaborate messianic [tale] in modern SF". Yet for all the critical discourse about the grand themes and classical allusions in *Dune*, there is surprisingly little discussion of Herbert's acknowledged use of "messianic mythology".

### WHEREVER I GO, THERE HE IS

Herbert's Bene Gesserit had little in common with regular nuns. Their organisation was supremely discrete, immensely powerful and resourceful. Its Sisters and Reverend Mothers trained for complete mastery of body and mind. By secretly controlling the marriages of the elite in a galaxy-wide programme of political interference and genetic engineering, they hoped to breed the superhuman 'messiah' – the *Kwisatz Haderech* – and here he was, in Paul Atreides, accidentally arriving a generation earlier than they had planned for.

The austerities forced upon young Paul and which shape the lives of the Fremen – an indigenous tribe of the ultra-arid planet Arrakis, also known as Dune – drew upon important elements from the desert cultures (not just that of the Arabs) of Old Earth. But the character of Paul Atreides – the *Kwisatz Haderech* or "shortener of the way" – fulfils the Fremen prophecy and yet breaks free of Bene Gesserit control.

The prime ability of this prophet – an altered state of consciousness in which he experiences all possible futures – is triggered by the vision-enabling drug melange, leaving him trapped in it perpetually. He foresees the looming extinction of humankind and how it might be avoided. This "Golden Path"<sup>10</sup> requires him – or one of his descendants – to become near immortal and impose a 3,500-year reign of terror (involving many billions of deaths) upon the known Universe.

The paranormal abilities of the *Kwisatz Haderech* also flower in Paul's children and their descendants. The greatest of these is Leto 2, Paul's son. Mutated by the spice, Leto becomes the fearsome and tyrannical God-Emperor of Dune. In this immortal form he rules for around 3,500 more years before engineering his own death in a way that precipitates the "Golden Path".<sup>11</sup>

Other key figures are all distant descen-





© 2019 WARNER BROS. ENTERTAINMENT INC.

**ABOVE:** Timothée Chalamet as Paul Atreides, the *Kwisatz Haderech* or 'shortener of the way', and Charlotte Rampling as Reverend Mother Mohiam of the Bene Gesserit in Denis Villeneuve's new film adaptation of *Dune*. **BELOW:** Did someone say Just Eat? Daniel in the lions' den; Habakkuk, with bread and soup, is transported to Babylon by an angel to feed the imprisoned hero.

dants of Leto's twin sister Ghanima. Sheanna was a female shaman who could bond with and control sandworms. Miles Teg (in both original and cloned form) manifests incredible speed and strength. Siona carried the ability to hide from prescience (and that included the 'Great Enemy' – the thinking machines, who were foreseen to return and exterminate humanity in the future). The association of similar 'wild talents' with shamanistic practices is a feature of anthropological studies.

Now we can uncover the story behind the borrowed Hebrew phrase *kefitzat haderech*, how Herbert used it, and how it relates to 'teleportation'.

## OLD TESTAMENT DUNE

It is clear from the many borrowings from Hebrew in Frank Herbert's writings, that Hebrew literature had been included in his eclectic reading programme. When he first uses the phrase *Kwisatz Haderech* in *Dune*, he has the character of Liet Kynes (the Imperial planetologist of Arrakis) explain it as from an old legend meaning "the shortening of the way". The Bene Gesserit use another phrase – the "one who can be many places at once" – which implies some kind of teleportation or bilocation, but also refers to their complaint that wherever they look in 'Other Memory' they see the *Kwisatz Haderech* blocking them.

In Hasidic Judaism, the phrase that inspired Herbert – *kefitzat haderech* – is sometimes confused with *teleportation* because it creates the impression that someone was in two places at once.<sup>12</sup> Preserved in the Bible are a few tales of what seem like teleportation or levitation; tales which were already old long before they were recorded in the histories. However, none of them use the phrase *kefitzat haderech*. Gedalyah

Nigal, a historian of Hasidic literature at Bar-Ilan University, affirms that although "the concept of *kefitzat ha-derech* does not appear in the Bible, there are three mentioned in the Talmud".

Nigal's three "for whom the Earth [*ha-aretz*] shrank" were "Eliezer, Abraham's servant; the patriarch Jacob; and Abishai, son of Zeruihah."<sup>13</sup> Scholars still debate the exploits of skilled rabbis and whether these early mentions of *kefitzat ha-aretz* – "Earth-shrinking" – correspond to the post-Talmudic interpretation of *kefitzat haderech*. I see them

as not too far apart; both terms *could* apply to the same phenomenon viewed from each end of the transition.

Eliezer was the servant of Abraham who had to deliver a will to Abraham's son Isaac at Haran (a Syrian town now in southern Turkey). Eliezer set out from Hebron (on Jerusalem's West Bank), a journey of "17 days", but to Eliezer's great astonishment, he arrived at Haran in just "three hours". In a commentary by Rabbi Abbahu (AD 279-320), of the Syria Palæstina academy, he explains that God so loved Isaac "he sent an angel before Eliezer; and the way was shortened for him."<sup>14</sup>

The well-known biblical tale of Habakkuk – a minor prophet in Israel's southern kingdom who flourished around 612 BC – offers a prime example of transvection.<sup>15</sup> Habakkuk is airlifted by an angel from Judah to Babylon where Darius had imprisoned Daniel. (Daniel 13:33-39.)

One day, Habakkuk was taking some bread and soup in a pot to workers in a field, when he was suddenly accosted by an angel. The entity ordered him to take the meal to Daniel, at that time thrown into the lion's den. Habakkuk protested that he has never been to Babylon and would not know where he would look for the lion's den. Immediately, the angel "took him by the crown and lifted him up by the hair of his head, and with the blast of his breath set him in Babylon over the den". The account is disappointingly terse. As soon as Daniel had eaten, Habakkuk vanished. The text simply says: "Daniel arose and did eat; and the Angel of God set Habakkuk in his own place again immediately."

When the psychologist Nandor Fodor discussed this story, he noted that "Habakkuk did not land on solid earth in Babylon. He apparently hovered over



the lion's den, dropped the food and watched Daniel eat.”<sup>16</sup> Fodor thought the use of the word “immediately” was significant. It certainly implies that the ‘shortening of this way’ was instantaneous.

Various translations agree that the angel seized Habakkuk by the hair on the crown of his head; a curious detail that has consistently baffled commentators. One explanation may be provided by the reason Kurdish Dervishes keep their hair uncut beneath turbans. “When Allah is ready to pull us out of this world and into paradise, he will be able to grip our hair.”<sup>17</sup>

Ezekiel – the Hebrew prophet who flourished around the sixth to fifth centuries BC in Babylonia – has left a record of how the moment of his teleportation trance felt to him: “While I was sitting in my house and the elders of Judah were sitting before me, the hand of the Sovereign LORD came on me there. I looked, and I saw a figure like that of a man. From what appeared to be his waist down he was like fire, and from there up his appearance was as bright as glowing metal. He stretched out what looked like a hand and took me by the hair of my head. The Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven and in visions of God he took me to Jerusalem, to the entrance of the north gate of the inner court, where the idol that provokes to jealousy stood.” (Ezekiel 8:1-3)

Now, let us see what the magical folktales about the rabbis tell us of *kefitzat haderech*.

## MASTERS OF THE GOOD NAME

The similarities between the Judaic and the Islamic traditions in this matter (more on this below) are best explained by their common historical origin, after the time Abraham's tribe migrated out of Ur, supposedly sometime before 2000 BC. From this period to roughly 500 BC, the Canaanite region was a chaos of religious monolatry.<sup>18</sup> By the time the Babylonian exile of the Jewish peoples ended, a succession of prophets up to Ezekiel and Ezra (Islamic: Edras) had succeeded in converting their culture to the monotheistic worship of YHWH. In the process, the “Oral Torah” began to be codified into the *Mishnah* (one of the foundations of the *Talmud*) during the late second century and continued up to the late sixth century AD.<sup>20</sup>

There were two other factors important to us in this process: the first was the migration of large numbers of tribal peoples away from their desert life into more settled communities in towns and cities; and the other was the establishment of Jewish academies known as *yeshivas*. If I understand Gedalyah Nigal correctly, when the first religious *yeshiva* ‘academies’ were established,<sup>21</sup> the various functions of earlier healers, amulet



LEFT: *The Transfiguration*, by Carl Bloch, 1872. Jesus is flanked by Ezekiel and Moses. Peter, James and John look on in wonder. BELOW: The Tetragrammaton, an arrangement of the four characters making up the ineffable Name of God.

within the *hekhla*, the ‘Holy of Holies’.<sup>22</sup>

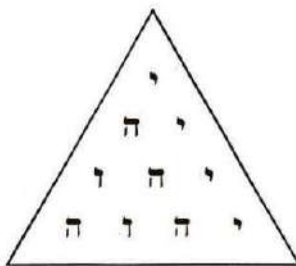
These early religious types were known as the *baalei shem* – renowned ‘scholar-priests’ who refined their philosophical and magical knowledge into the *kabbala*.<sup>23</sup> They gained a reputation for working miracles, and this was popularised in folktales. In fact, as Gedalyah Nigal notes, “the first text to explicitly mention and discuss their abilities, indicates that *kefitzat ha-derekh* is one of the characteristics of *baalei shem*”.<sup>24</sup> This text records a question put to Rav Hai Gaon (939-1038) by the ‘Kairouan community’ in North Africa. They had heard a rumour that “... so-and-so, a well-known person from among the *baalei shem*, [had been seen] on Sabbath eve in such-and-such a place, and he was seen in another place, a

distance of several days’ journey, on the eve of the same Sabbath, and he was seen on the same Sabbath in the first place”.<sup>25</sup> A rationalistic lawyer, Rabbi Hai Gaon, responds that “*kefitzat ha-derekh* is one of the things which are not possible.” Nigal notes that despite Rav Hai Gaon's caution (he may simply have been keeping the kabbalistic ‘secret’) those curious Jews might have been referring to a tradition among the Spanish Jews, that Mar Rav Natronai (AD 719-730) had come to them from Babylonia with the aid of the *kefitzat haderech*, taught *Torah* to them and vanished. He did not go in a caravan and was not seen on the way. It was, argues Nigal, a demonstration that superstitious belief in the *kefitzat haderech* was so entrenched in the wider community that “it was stronger than any *halakhic* response based on pure logic.”<sup>26</sup>

A prominent example of a Jewish mystic of this type was the 18<sup>th</sup> century Polish kabbalist and astronomer Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer (c.1698-1760) – also known as the *Baal Shem Tov* (which means ‘Master of the Good Name’, shortened to ‘Besht’). When the Besht was forced to flee from persecution by the citizens of Slutsk, in Belarus, he did so with the help of *kefitzat haderech*: “And he went from there in half the night, by the shrinking of the Earth by about 15 parasangs, until he left their bounds for another kingdom.”<sup>27</sup>

Many of the stories collected by Nigal are of a specific type. A rabbi is required to conduct a certain rite or teaching in a faraway place, but cannot either get there or

## “HE STRETCHED OUT A HAND AND TOOK ME BY THE HAIR OF MY HEAD”



makers, interpreters of dreams, exorcists, teachers, finders of lost things, prognosticators and officiators of sacrifices were subsumed into the figure and office of what later became known as the rabbi.

The most potent of their secrets was the use of the Ineffable Name of God (*HaShem*), the four-character representation of which was called *Tetragrammaton*. The correct pronunciation of the *Hashem* – so essential to imbuing spells and amulets with divine efficacy – was prohibited to all except the High Priest, and, supposedly, only to be uttered

return by any conventional means before the Sabbath. He completes his task with the aid of the *kefitzat haderech*, sometimes taking a few companions with him.

A persistent legend about another Rabbi – Eleazar ben Judah Of Worms (c.1160-c.1230), regarded as the founder of Hasidic Judaism – was that he had used the *kefitzat haderech* to travel from the German city Of Worms<sup>28</sup> to Spain to teach the Kabbalah to Nahmanides (1194-1270). “Each night, the soul of Rabbi Eleazar would ascend to heaven, and thus it learned that Nahmanides encountered difficulties that could be resolved only with knowledge of the *Kabbalah*. [On another occasion he] brought hot *matzot* with him from Worms, possibly to prove to those who doubted his abilities that he had indeed arrived that day from far away.”<sup>29</sup>

Nigal also tells of the use of the Name on a ship by the poet Rabbi Shabbetai (d.886) in southern Italy: “Rabbi Shabbetai and Papoleon, who were on a ship, entered into a conversation with the captain, saying, ‘We shall make a Name, go quickly, and be at our destination in Africa this very night.’ They wrote and uttered ‘the Name of the Dweller of the heights’, and they cast it into the waters of the sea. Despite their warning to the sailors not to sleep, the latter fell asleep, the ship overturned, and those on board drowned. The ship continued on its way, for there was no one to stop the functioning of the Name: ‘And the power of the Name led the ship to Hispania [Spain] and Narbonne, as well as in the sea of Constantinople, and went back to the sea of Ancona, and then broke up at the state of Amalfi.’”<sup>30</sup>

Yet another variation of rapid travel was by coach. According to Nigal: “The event often takes place at the conclusion of the

Sabbath. The non-Jewish coachman takes the reins in his hand, and the horses begin to go along. Sometime later, as soon as they have left the city, the coachman turns back toward the passengers and falls asleep. The horses go on by themselves, at great speed. The carriage leaves the ground, and, from their vantage point in the sky, those sitting in it see towns and fields flashing by beneath them. Only as the travellers near their destination does the carriage land, with its wheels on solid ground once again. The horses pull the carriage in their normal manner, and the journey ends as a normal one, in the manner that it began.”<sup>31</sup>

More exotically, the Besht was known to use “extreme forms”. Once, while travelling “in the cloud shape which was appointed for this purpose” he fell off. “One time he had to perform a circumcision in a distant place, and he rode with an adjuration, according to his customary formula. He forgot one thing from the usage required by those possessing this wisdom. He fell close to the earth, became lame and ill in his thigh, and was not healed of this illness by any bandage until the day his resting place shall be glorious.”<sup>32</sup>

### FOLDED SPACE

Of the teleportation-like experience itself, the Hasidic tales are short on details, saying simply that the parties arrived quickly or instantly. In some of the tales, the rabbi’s companions have been warned not to fall asleep, but do so anyway – an odd detail, but perhaps it is an idiomatic code for the associated altered state of consciousness.

We can, however, distinguish two variants of the *kefitzat haderech* event; one is more like teleportation (travelling seemingly instantly between two locations); the other,

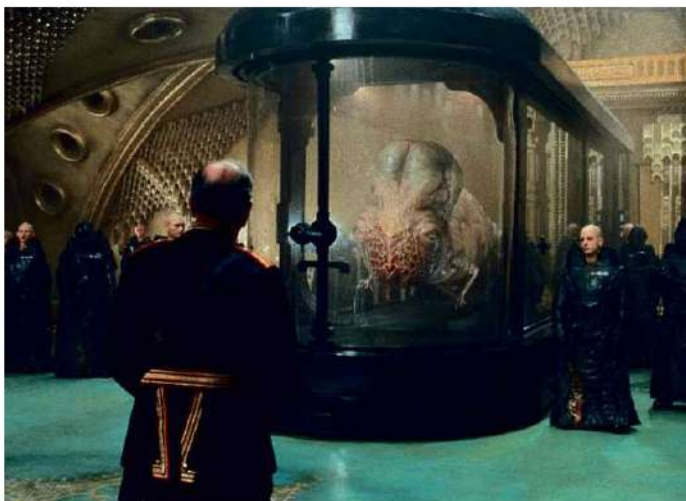
more eerily, reports that the distance itself closes, hence the term “shortening the way”, the phrase most often used in *Dune*, which speaks of space being “folded”. It seems to me that Herbert quite liked the sound of this exotic detail and, as was his habit, adapted it to his story. Witness the opening commentary by Princess Irulan in David Lynch’s 1984 film version, referring to the way melange has mutated the Spacing Guild Navigators and given them “the ability to fold space, [that is] to travel to any part of the Universe without moving”.

The latter form is favoured as the meaning of the Islamic equivalent of *kefitzat haderech*, called *tay-al-ard* (Arabic: “folding up of the earth”). It is also defined as “to traverse the earth without moving”, implying, in effect, that “the earth has been displaced under the enlightened one’s feet”.<sup>33</sup>

Like their Jewish counterparts, the Islamic tales come down to us as homilies or folktales. For example, in his survey of the Sufis, Idries Shah mentions, quite casually: “The Qadiri dervishes are seen walking upon water; the Azimia are reputed to appear, like many of the ancient Sheikhs, at different places at one and the same time...” and leaves it there.<sup>34</sup>

The Islamic discourse about this teleportation-like phenomenon takes place mainly in the forums of religious and legal scholars, where it is considered to be a species of religious or magical process (rather than scientific or physical) that can be learned and mastered by men, djinn and angels and is judged on whether its purpose is good or evil.

The important Persian/Iranian *Dehkhoda Dictionary* (first edition published 1931) classes *tay-al-ard* (sometimes *tei-al-ardh*) as a type of *karamat* (an Arabic term for a



ABOVE LEFT: King Solomon enthroned between his grand vizier Asif bin Barkhiya (left) and king of Djinn (right). Asif’s skill with magic inspired many legends, including those of ‘flying carpets’. His feat of bringing the Queen of Sheba’s throne to Solomon “in the twinkling of an eye” is mentioned in the Quran. ABOVE RIGHT: A mutated Spacing Guild Navigator, who uses ‘spice’ to induce visions of the safest routes for space navigation, as visualised in David Lynch’s 1984 film.





ABOVE: Some of the cast of Denis Villeneuve's new film adaptation: (left to right) Rebecca Ferguson as Lady Jessica Atreides, Zendaya as Chani, Javier Bardem as Stilgar, Timothée Chalamet as Paul Atreides.

FACING PAGE: Rebecca Ferguson as Lady Jessica.

miracle, a “marvel by the friends of God”).<sup>35</sup> Its exploitation was condemned by the prophet Mohammad because of its association (in Islamic lore) with the magic of the djinn, classed as ‘Black Magic’ (Arabic: *Sihir*) and therefore ‘forbidden’ (Arabic: *haram*).<sup>36</sup> Consequently, very few specific cases have been translated from the Islamic hagiographies, debates and teachings, and these are mainly attributed to the mastery of sainted characters. One of the few discussions of *tay-al-ard* of any length in a non-Islamic text is an extraordinary source that I can only mention with a strong caveat. Its author – Maximilian Lafayette – cites some useful material from Islamic sources but then tests our credibility by asserting that the knowledge was originally derived from the extraterrestrial Anunnaki.<sup>37</sup> One of his more interesting assertions is that the phenomenon was originally known to the Sufis as *tay-al-makan* (Arabic: *tay* “to fold”, and *makan* “space or a location”). Lafayette also notes that some *Ulema* rationalists have taken to explaining *tay-al-ard*, pseudo-scientifically, as “the termination of matter itself in the original location, and its re-appearance, manifestation, and re-creation in its final location”.<sup>38</sup>

## ENDGAME OF THRONES

As we come to the close, we return to the Oral Torah and its later codification, which led to the rise in prominence of the Kabbalah. This in turn facilitated both a system of magic and a school of associated mysticism called *Merkabah* (Chariot or Throne mysticism) after the manner of the mysterious ascensions of both Ezekiel and Elijah.<sup>39</sup> Now, anyone mystically inclined had a formal structure for their personal journey into God’s Presence (*Shekhinah*).<sup>40</sup>

Like a form of Hasidic yoga, the journey requires both an intense study of Kabbalah, intonation of prayers and meditation upon the symbolism of chariot ascensions to negotiate a route through seven ‘palaces’ (or ‘Thrones’) linked by seven ‘gates’, each with their own archangelic guardian. If it goes well, in a moment of sublime *kefitzat haderech*, the spiritual ‘distance’ between the mystic and the Presence of God is clenched into the bliss of ‘reunion’ and illumination.

According to the *Berit Menuchah* – a kabbalistic text of the 14<sup>th</sup> century – the Archangel Cassiel, the entity that guards the Seventh Gate (who has its roots in Mesopotamian mythology) is the arbiter of fate, space and time.<sup>41</sup> I wonder whether Nandor Fodor knew of this when he compiled his account of ‘teleportation’. He remarked of the phenomenon that “it is as though the barriers of space-time somehow are transcended.”<sup>42</sup>

These ancient notions have an echo in the accounts of the two ecstatic journeys of the Prophet Muhammad (AD 570-632). In the first – *Al-Isra* (the Night Journey) – the prophet is “taken” from the “Sacred Mosque” in Mecca to the “furthest mosque”, that is the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem – a distance of roughly 770 miles (1,239km) and back in one night. This is often said to be an example of *tay-al-ard*.<sup>43</sup> In the second – *Al-Mi’raj* – Mohammad ascends through the seven heavens with the Archangel Gabriel, and at each he stops to gain the blessing of all the great prophets until, finally, he is given his commission by God. Originally these famous events were separate, but over time, many variations and interpretations have been established and, in most of them, the two journeys were made contiguous and celebrated on the night of 27 Rajab (11 March).

## THE SHAMANS OF DUNE

In *Dune*, perhaps, without specifically realising it, Herbert managed to acknowledge the close relationship between paranormal phenomena within shamanic experiences and the role entheogenic drugs play in shaping those experiences.

Paul Atreides, like many shamanic figures, real and imagined, was entranced for his journeys, and like the rabbinical “Masters of the Name”, is credited with “seeing everything” and “knowing everything”. This kind of universal awareness, regardless of distance, seems to be a special form of *kefitzat haderech* resembling remote viewing or clairvoyance. Such experiences are, in some form, part of the universal repertoire of shamanism.

The Prophet Mohammad’s famous Night Journey was followed by his visionary ascent to the Seventh Heaven, a slightly different example of *kefitzat haderech*-like journeys. It includes another element of universal shamanic experience, one which ties together many of our threads of interest; in this case, a form of ritualised dismemberment immediately prior to the heavenly ascension. In a narrative by Ibn-Ishaq, Muhammad says, with impressive simplicity: “While I was with a comrade of mine behind our tents shepherding the lambs, two men in white raiment came to me with a gold basin full of snow. Then they seized me and opened up my belly, extracted my heart and split it; then they extracted a black drop from it and threw it away; then they washed my heart and my belly with that snow until they had thoroughly cleaned them.”<sup>44</sup>

While the evidence confirms that Herbert retrieved the *kefitzat haderech* from the Hasidic folktales and “made it new”, there is no evidence that he went any further into the *Merkabah* and kabbalistic literature of the subject. His distinctive depiction of the “shortening of the way” seems all the more mysterious and exciting for it. The biggest difference, I think, is that where the phrase once applied to the process of mystical movement, Herbert applied it as a title to the mover himself. In any case, we might never know just how much of the mystical theology behind it appealed to his own inner mystic.

There is much more to these brief accounts and arguments, of course, but space – in a form of *kefitzat haderech* – prohibits us from exploring it here.

*I appreciate the people who have helped the gestation of this article over the years, but none so ready to help and so free with their knowledge as the admirable Loess Moddermann and Ulrich Magin.*

➡ **BOB RICKARD** has enjoyed the SF genre since getting a subscription to *Astounding Science Fiction* for his 15th birthday. This is what led him to the writings of Charles Fort and founding FT. He still enjoys the overlap between SF and fortana 60 years later.

## NOTES

1 In my use of *Dune*, I also sometimes mean the six novels that comprise the canon. They are, in order: *Dune* (1965), *Dune Messiah* (1969), *Children of Dune* (1976), *God Emperor of Dune* (1981), *Heretics of Dune* (1984), and *Chapter-house: Dune* (1985).

2 To those anxious about plot 'spoilers', I can only advise stopping here and reading the *Dune* books. There is so much to pack into a restricted space that I will have to both summarise a great deal, and assume the reader already has some knowledge of the books.

3 See Brian Herbert's biography of his father Frank, *Dreamer of Dune* (Tor Books, 2003). Most of my notes on Herbert's character, interests, and writing come from this biography, and I commend it to any interested reader.

4 Most of the *Dune*-related terms I have used can be consulted in the *SF Encyclopedia* – online at <http://www.sf-encyclopedia.com/>

5 A view first declared 12 years earlier in the launch issue of the *Whole Earth Catalog*, Gerald Jonas, 'The Sandworm Saga', *The New York Times Book Review*, 17 May 1981.

6 Brian Herbert, *op.cit.*, p.35.

7 <https://baheyeldin.com/literature/arabic-and-islamic-themes-in-frank-herberts-dune.html>

8 See Andreea Monica Georgescu, *Greek Mythological Influences in Frank Herbert's 'Dune' saga and Arthur Clarke's series 'A Space Odyssey'*, thesis, Bucharest University, 2013.

9 Brian Herbert, *op.cit.*, pp.136-142.

10 [https://dune.fandom.com/wiki/The\\_Golden\\_Path](https://dune.fandom.com/wiki/The_Golden_Path)

11 The *dune.fandom* site ([op.sit.](http://dune.fandom.com)) points out that the Hindu term for God-Emperor – 'Chakravartin' – also applies to a mystic who can 'cross the boundaries of several castes and is therefore able to change the course of history, time and destiny'. Coincidentally, a literal translation of the Sanskrit word implies a ruler 'whose chariot wheels roll everywhere', which was precisely Leto 2's mode of travel outside his desert redoubt.

12 I have found it useful to think of the different forms of levitation as 'phases' of a progressive process. The first is levitation being a simple up-and-down movement on a vertical axis. Transvection (which I borrow from the old witch-hammering tracts) adds the next step, resulting in proper vectors of flight in all three dimensions. Add a fourth dimension (time, perhaps) and teleportation-like transitions become feasible.

13 Gedalyah Nigal, *Magic, Mysticism and Hasidism: The Supernatural in Jewish Thought* (1994, trans. 2005).

14 My emphasis. Cited in the *Pirkei de Rabbi Eliezer*, composed in Italy shortly after 830; translated and edited by Gerald Friedlander (1916), p.108f.

15 It is probable that this tale was not known to the early Jews in exile. Daniel flourished approximately 600–530 BC, but the story of Habakkuk's visit to Daniel did not appear in the *Book of Daniel* (in the chapter 'Bel and the Dragon') until sometime in the second or third century AD. Nevertheless, it is a valuable historical record of the idea of angelic aerial translocation.

16 Nandor Fodor, *Mind over Space* (1962), pp.8-9.

17 Douchan Gersi, *Faces in the Smoke*, Tarcher

LA, (1991), ch.6.

18 Monolatry: many different local gods; but some areas (like Canaan) chose a main one and continued to tolerate the others.

19 After several years under siege, Jerusalem finally fell to Nebuchadnezzar II in 587 BC and Judah became a vassal state of Babylon. To quell the succession or revolts untold numbers of Jews were forcibly relocated to Babylonia in three mass deportations. When the Persian king Cyrus conquered Babylon in 539 BC, he freed the Jews to return, and the building of the Second Temple began.



20 The Babylonian *Talmud* comprises the Jewish law codes (*Halakhah*), the *Mishnah* (the first written version of the older oral law) and the *Gemara* (the record of the rabbinic discussions).

21 The two main Babylonian *yeshivas* – at Sura and at Pumbedita – were founded prior to the emergence of Islam. In the time of the Abbassids – after the founding of Islam – both *yeshivas* relocated to Baghdad.

22 See my article on God's Holy Name and how it was stolen to enable flying: 'Jesus and the Temptations, pt 2: Lifted up from the Earth', **FT393:46-51**.

23 There are various spellings of this term for Jewish esotericism. For the sake of consistency, I opt for the Jewish spelling.

24 Nigal, *op.cit.*, pp.33-34. The antiquity of the *Ba al shem* and their magical journey-shortening as part of the Hasidic story-telling tradition is also confirmed in the *Britannica Online* (1994): 'Ba al shem'.

25 Nigal, *op.cit.*, pp.34

26 Nigal, *op.cit.*, pp.33-34.

27 Nigal, *op.cit.*, p.45. Parasang is an ancient Persian unit of distance, traditionally the distance someone could walk in a specified time; sometimes said to be a 'European league' or just under

four miles or six kilometres.

28 Given that our discussion is about *Dune* and its giant sandworms there is a remarkable pun here. Rabbi Eleazar – said to have been one of the greatest exponents of 'shortening the way' – lived in Worms, in the Rhineland-Palatinate, one of the oldest cities in northern Europe. To add to this *Dune*-related curiosity, one of his best-known works is an ethical code known as *Rokea* (which his biographical entry in *Britannica* translates as 'Dealer in Spice').

29 Nigal, *op.cit.*, pp.39. The mention of hot matzot as evidence of his travelling reminds us that the protagonist in HG Wells' *The Time Machine* brought back a flower as proof of his adventure.

30 Nigal, *op.cit.*, pp.36.

31 Nigal, *op.cit.*, pp.44.

32 Nigal, *op.cit.*, pp.37-38.

33 See the standard definition at: [https://dbpedia.org/page/Tay\\_al-Ard](https://dbpedia.org/page/Tay_al-Ard) There are variations in the spelling of *tay-al-ard*, but the experience itself is common to Sūnis, Shīas and Sūfis.

34 Idrīs Shah, *The Sūfis* (1964) p.372.

35 *Karamat*. This Arabic word is widely used in the modern Islamic world as an equivalent to the English 'miracle'. But strictly it refers to a specific repertoire of 'divine gifts' (including knowing another's thoughts, invisibility, levitation and *tay-al-ard*). In this meaning it is more like the Sanskrit word *siddhi* (ie, a set of eight classic accomplishments being a sign of spiritual progress).

36 All kinds of magic are *haram*, especially *Sihr* (Quranic Arabic = 'forbidden'), a category that includes much of what in the West would be called psychical phenomena. See: <https://today.salamweb.com/why-is-black-magic-forbidden-in-islam/>

37 Maximilien de Lafayette, *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Djin, Sihr And Spiritism Languages. Vocabulary, Phraseology and Dictionary of the Languages of Sahirinn, Djinn, Afarit, Shayatin, Spirits, Witchcraft*, (2014). The scholarship in his books is quite unconventional (to say the least), so we must tread cautiously until his sources can be verified. If any reader has

any insight into their accuracy, please contact me via FT.

38 Lafayette, *op.cit.* My copy had no numbered pages!

39 For more on *Merkabah*, and its esoteric literature, called *Hekhalot* see: [wikipedia.org/wiki/Merkabah\\_mysticism](https://wikipedia.org/wiki/Merkabah_mysticism)

40 Ulrich Magin reminds me that in its Arabic form (*sakinat*) the *Shekhinah* is among the central concepts of the *Quran*.

41 Elijah (Elias in Islam) was a ninth century prophet in Israel's northern kingdom. Although he is said to have been taken to heaven in a 'chariot of fire' (2 Kings 2:8-9) amid a whirlwind, many believe he accompanied Jesus during the Transfiguration and will come again.

42 Fodor, *op.cit.*, pp.8-9.

43 The Prophet is aided in this by the Archangel Gabriel (Jibril) and the magical entity known as Al-Buraq, a divine mount also used by some other prophets. See also JR Porter, 'Mohammad's Journey to Heaven', *Numen* (April 1974) v21:1, pp.64-80.

44 Ibn-Ishaq's narrative is translated in A Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad* (Pelican, 1955) p.72.

# REVISITING ARTHUR C CLARKE'S MYSTERIOUS WORLD

PART  
2

Just over 40 years ago, unsuspecting ITV viewers were taken on a sometimes terrifying tour of the planet's anomalies – from “the missing apeman” to “the Skull of Doom”. **RYAN SHIRLOW** hits the rewind button and reappraises a classic of forteen television.

**W**elcome back. Last month, we looked at the first six episodes of Arthur

C Clarke's famous 1980 documentary series and asked what, if anything, we had learned about the programme's “mysteries” in the intervening years (FT410:32-39).

We saw how several archaeological mysteries had been resolved one way or the other with the help of modern techniques and new scientific evidence, which allowed us to sift real wonders (the Antikythera mechanism) from the fake (the Mitchell Hedges skull).<sup>1</sup> And while we'll never have all the answers when it comes to the identity and motivation of the people who cut the Nazca lines or the Uffington Horse, the questions at least make sense and the possible answers feel human and reliable.

Meanwhile, the cryptozoological mysteries left us with more of a challenge. Science, over the intervening 40 years, has not been particularly kind to the existence of Bigfoot, sea serpents or lake monsters: hoaxes have been exposed and purported evidence critiqued and sometimes debunked. But a large body of personal testimony, of raw experience, remains. It is difficult to dismiss the conclusion that normal people inconveniently experience the technically impossible.

In this second part of our analysis, we will tackle the next four episodes, once again covering a diverse range of subjects – everything from the Tunguska explosion to Stonehenge, and from falls of fish to the search for evidence of UFOs.

And don't forget that you can watch along at home with the Network DVD edition, released shortly before Clarke passed away in 2008.



LEFT: Latter-day druids at Stonehenge in the early 1980s; Clarke wasn't a fan.

## SCIENCE, OVER THE INTERVENING YEARS, HAS NOT BEEN KIND TO THE EXISTENCE OF LAKE MONSTERS

### Episode 7: The Great Siberian Explosion

This episode is something of an outlier, for it focuses on one specific mystery for the whole of its 26-minute running time: the massive aerial detonation at Tunguska, Siberia, on 30 June 1908 (see FT1:12, 189:4).

The initial blast was heard up to 1,000 miles away and laid waste to an area of trees “the size of London and New York put together”. For weeks, the nights in Europe were as bright as day – a phenomenon recorded in the *Daily Express* and *Times* newspapers, complete with black and white photographs taken after midnight.

The programme is padded out with

archive footage and a long, detailed and erroneous history of the investigation conducted in the early days of the USSR (the first expedition in 1921 failed; it was the second, in 1927, that reached ground zero.)<sup>2</sup>

Soviet scientists started with the assumption of a meteor, but no fragments could be found. Later studies detected tiny globules of silica and metal, which along with the blast pattern in the damaged trees suggested an air burst at high altitude. Later, traces of elements were found that could only have come from outer space. Discussing how the plants and insects in the vicinity had been exposed to electromagnetic radiation, Dr Nikolai Vasilievsky warns us their “genetic pattern has been violated.”

For the most part we are left with Gordon Honeycombe. Clarke reappears half way through to speculate with limited enthusiasm about anti-matter and miniature black holes. Struggling not to scoff, he dismisses the prospect of an exploding spaceship as a “romantic” notion. The Russian scientists quoted are divided as to their specific theories, but seem largely in favour of a mundane astronomical origin.

A brief review of the evidence conducted by NASA to commemorate the centenary sums up our current understanding: that a mass of rock entered the Earth's atmosphere and detonated under intense heat and pressure, with a power equivalent to 185 Hiroshimas. The nights of daylight are explained by dense clouds of debris rising into the atmosphere and reflecting the Sun over the horizon.<sup>3</sup> On average, a rock of this size would be expected to enter the atmosphere once every 300 years. As if to underline this prediction, on 15 February



2013 an object about half the size exploded over Chelyabinsk Oblast (see FT300:7, 58-59).<sup>4</sup>

Clarke concludes by suggesting a tenuous link to a meteor stream known as the Beta Taurids, which interact with Earth “every 30th June”. But the Beta Taurid peak is actually on the 28th, and the same asteroids also cross Earth’s path in October. Fort was similarly frustrated by such arbitrary flexibility in the interpretation of astronomical patterns. In his closing remarks, Clarke interprets Tunguska through the lens of the Cold War: future denotations might inadvertently trigger a thermonuclear exchange, a tangible threat that lay heavy on the minds of viewers in 1980. But if the initial impact was big enough, he muses, there might not be anyone left to worry about...

### Episode 8: The Riddle of the Stones

We start with a superb ambient drone, courtesy of electronic composer Alan Hawkshaw. He remains on form for the rest of this episode, providing the perfect backdrop to the saturated vintage visuals and Honeycombe’s increasingly doom-soaked baritone as he introduces Britain and Ireland’s rings of stone.<sup>5</sup>

From his retreat in Sri Lanka, Clarke pours scorn on the latter-day Druids who claim a special connection with (and access rights to) Stonehenge. They have no more right to be there than anyone else, he complains, as they subscribe to an 18th century “romantic” re-invention (that word again). Besides, even the original Druids flourished “a thousand years” after the stones were erected – in fact, probably double that.<sup>6</sup> But does Clarke really believe that people can’t interact with and attach new meaning to a pre-existing landscape?

The astronomical connections at Stonehenge and elsewhere are explored beyond any doubt – these are no longer considered contentious or particularly mysterious, if they even were in 1980.<sup>7</sup> More interesting and challenging theories in archaeology now explore, for example, the acoustic properties of the bluestones.<sup>8</sup>

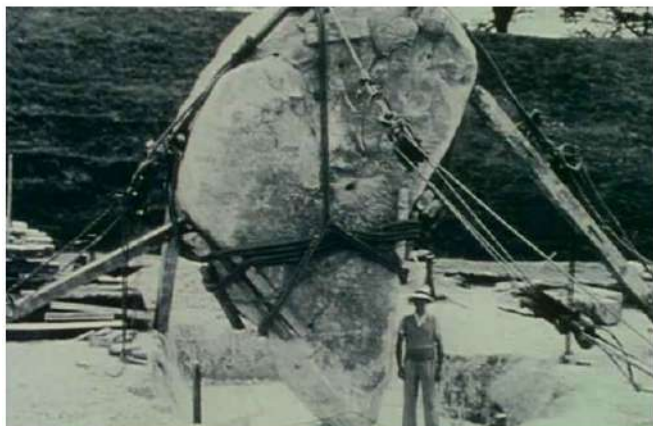
However, we are reminded that it is possible to go too far in the search for meaning. American schoolmaster Richard Brinckerhoff argues that odd marks on top of the henge represent additional sighting points for even more complex alignments. At one, a lunar cycle completes every 57 years – enough time to ritually sample every variety of Heinz?

The Neolithic tomb at Newgrange in Ireland is introduced as “almost unknown”. It certainly isn’t anymore – there were over 30,000 entries to the annual lottery for Solstice tickets in 2019.<sup>9</sup> This, the “oldest building in the world” was constructed 500 years before the Egyptian pyramids. At dawn on 21 December, the shortest day of the year, light enters via a slit and illuminates the sacred interior. Archaeologist Michael O’Kelley recounts this life-changing experience, waiting for



TOP: Tunguska, Siberia: nearly 20 years after the blast, the damage to trees remained evident.

CENTRE: Serious Soviet scientists discuss the Tunguska event. ABOVE: Atmospheric visions of Britain’s rings of stone, beautifully set to Alan Hawkshaw’s dark ambient drones.



## METEOROLOGY NOW DAMNS THESE DATA NOT FOR BEING TOO MYSTERIOUS BUT TOO MUNDANE

the spirits to tell him “to get the hell out of here”.

At Avebury, the world’s largest stone circle (see FT341:34-40), we are shown how the banks could have been built with primitive bone tools over 50 to 60 generations. The stones were dragged from the same source as Stonehenge using thick leather ropes; each could have taken two hundred people to move. This theory places very little demand on the technology of the past, and rather a lot on the continuity of culture over absurd timescales. It would be as if the Vikings were still building York; although I suppose, in a sense, their descendants are.

Throughout this episode, Clarke as presenter and Honeycombe as narrator grow increasingly at odds with one another, pulling the viewer back and forth as they channel the sceptic/believer divide. Were the circles simple meeting places? Or gruesome ritual centres?

We conclude with Castle Fraser and an example of a recumbent stone, laid absolutely horizontal. Dr Aubrey Burl outlines the crucial lunar alignments. But it is Honeycombe who leaves little to the imagination when he describes “the ashes of fires, the pitiful remains of many different children.” Current thinking is somewhat more understated and plays down the potential for lurid pagan sacrifices, but modern archaeologists certainly make for duller television.

### Episode 9: Out of the Blue

We begin with falls of living fish in the tropical rain at an airport in Queensland. The locals fried them for a tasty snack.

Clarke shows off his table tennis skills outside his club in Sri Lanka, introducing “my partner here, Sarath”, who witnessed a fish fall from a rainbow. Might there be a coded message in this scene, one that would have sailed over the conservative heads of a mainstream ITV audience in 1980? Clarke never openly publicised his sexuality, but was believed by friends and associates to be privately gay. He would later admit in a 1986 *Playboy* interview to having had at least one bisexual experience<sup>10</sup> and was buried alongside his close friend Leslie Ekanayake in Colombo.<sup>11</sup> The now familiar rainbow flag had been recently introduced at the San Francisco Gay Freedom parade in 1978.

Back to the overt subject of the episode, and we have a fall of frogs at a fun-free

TOP: Avebury, 1934: one of the stones re-erected in modern times. CENTRE: Dawn at Newgrange, Ireland. ABOVE: Modern Druids at Stonehenge: there are numerous claims to our mysterious heritage.

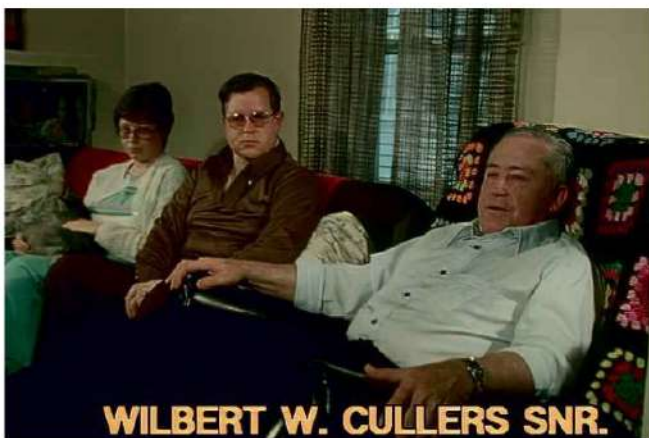
Alton Towers (in pre-rollercoaster days). Then Clarke again, who reveals his inspiration for the episode, and the series as a whole: the “remarkable American”, Charles Fort, with his catalogue of fish, grain, cinders, ants, worms, a turtle encased in ice and even an alligator plummeting from the skies. Examples are proffered from all over the world. In Louisiana, Mrs Eddie Gremullion describes, in a turn of phrase probably deemed more acceptable than homosexuality in 1980, her black maid “turning white with excitement”.

Clarke discusses the old whirlwind theory – debunked in *The Book of the Damned* – and, like Fort, asks how a whirlwind could select only one type of fish. Why no other objects? And why don’t we ever catch fish in the act of taking off? On this subject, science doesn’t appear to have advanced much since 1980: we still get fobbed off with mini-tornados, micro-whirlwinds and waterspouts. Meteorology now damns these data not for being too mysterious, but for being too mundane.<sup>12</sup>

We move on to falling blocks of ice. Wilbert W Cullers of Timberville, Virginia, describes his lucky escape when one crashed through the roof of his family home, accompanied by additional sound effects courtesy of *The Six Million Dollar Man* blaring from his TV. US Police Sergeant Butch Hottinger (no, really) is on the case (on secondment from the Village People?) His investigation takes him to the National Center for Atmospheric Research where Dr Charles Knight concludes: not a hailstone.

Knight explains that had it contained tea leaves he could have proven it fell from an airplane. Clarke says out loud what we are all thinking by this point: that blocks of ice can form on aircraft wings or fall “regrettably from faulty toilets”; but he also draws attention to reports from before the days of aviation. Richard Griffiths of Manchester University notes the very regular lines of bubbles in his sample, which are unlike those formed in normal hailstones. Despite evidence they are made of cloud water, speculation turns to cosmic ice meteors.

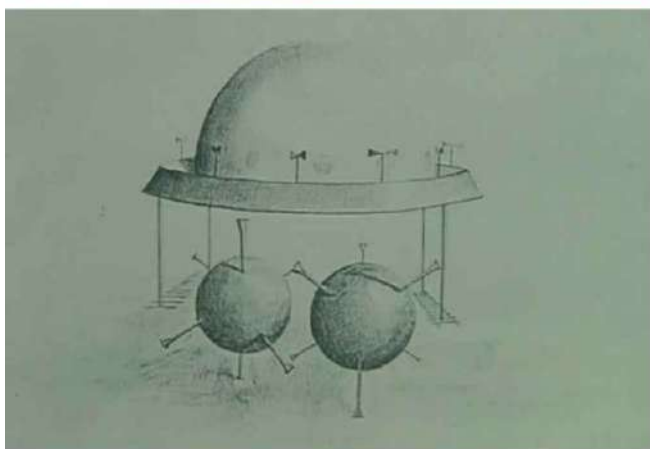
Clarke offers no such rational explanation for the extraordinary cases he concludes with. Mr Alfred Wilson Osborne, the chess correspondent for the *Bristol Evening Post* no less, encounters a shower of hazelnuts outside a car showroom.<sup>13</sup> His friend has the same experience in the same spot two or three minutes later. Where does a vortex suck up hazelnuts in March? (See FT26:48, 285:11) Honeycombe deadpans that there have been “further nutritious cascades” in Southampton, this time falling with the wind and snow: mustard and cress seed, broad-bean seeds, peas, maize and haricot beans. When planted, everything grew. The aptly named Mr Harold Gale complains that “this is bloody silly.” (Accounts of falls in FT are too numerous to list; for a recent round-up, see FT394:32.)



TOP: Alton Towers, now an amusement park, once played host to a fall of frogs.

CENTRE: The “remarkable American” Charles Fort, whose catalogue of falls inspired Clarke’s interest in the subject. ABOVE: At home in Virginia with Wilbert W Cullers Snr and family.





TOP: Ray Stanford in full contact safety garb. CENTRE: Invasion updates at Project Starlight International. ABOVE: The extraterrestrial device that left Bob Taylor in need of a tailor.

## Episode 10: UFOs

This episode presents us with a perfect example for the thornier of our two categories. Clarke describes himself as a reluctant expert on UFOs,<sup>14</sup> which he believes are actually very common: if you've never seen one you are either "unobservant or live in a cloudy area." He himself has seen half a dozen.

We start off with some low-quality photos and videos, which feel more evocative and inspiring than our contemporary UFO footage. Many of these shots are clumsy and obvious fakes, but we might now consider them as pieces of outsider or folk art, capturing a moment in our cultural history and the collective aspirations of a star-gazing public. As with the since debunked Mitchell-Hedges skull in the programme's title sequence, I once again find myself appreciating the imagery for its aesthetic and emotional resonance... and the truth be damned.

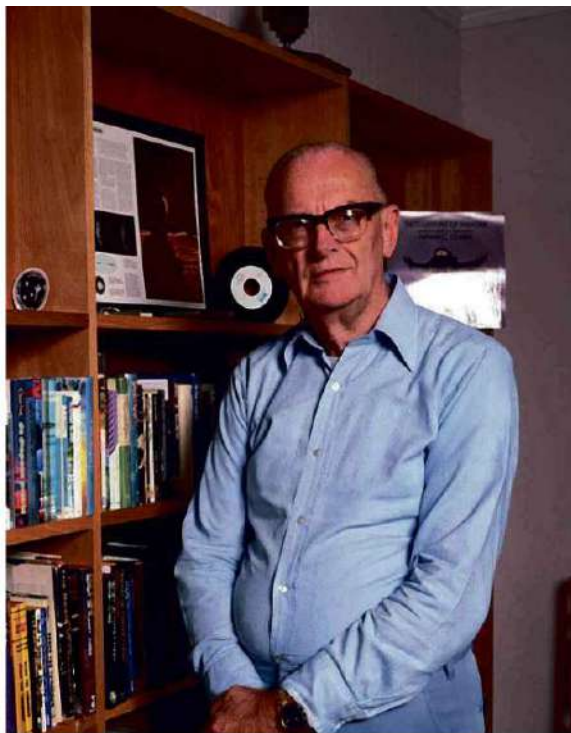
Next, a New Zealand TV crew describe their pursuit by a whole formation of UFOs. The camerawork (courtesy of a Mr David Crockett) is too shaky to rule out atmospheric phenomena. The planet Venus is suggested, but discounted. It "looks like an aircraft beacon," the voiceover tell us, and some radar confirmation was obtained.<sup>15</sup>

Then we skip across the Pacific and head north. Texan Ray Stanford, Director of Project Starlight International (see FT331:37), signals to passing spaceships with his lasers, and dispatches volunteers by teletext to intercept any detected craft. It would take Stanford another 30 years and a downward gaze to finally find scientific acceptance as the discoverer of some of the most significant dinosaur tracks in palaeontology.<sup>16</sup>

A pause, and a quick overview of the history of UFOs leads us from Kenneth Arnold's seminal sighting to a report filed by a pre-presidential Jimmy Carter. Clarke implores us not to mock his witnesses, and suggests weather balloons and traditional aircraft can easily fool the observer. A Dr Robert Nathan showcases some early image enhancement hardware, and convincingly reveals that one shot is of a small commercial airplane.

In the second half, Clarke moves us along to discuss his real interest: close encounters. Mrs Jessie Roestenber is visited in her Staffordshire farmhouse by an object shaped like a "huge Mexican hat", carrying beautiful people with long golden hair "like the old Kings". What on Earth did she and her children all witness? Again, personal testimony challenges our comfortable notions of reality.

Forestry Worker Bob Taylor stumbles on a domed object in woodland outside Edinburgh, and is attacked by a pair of rolling spiked spheres that tear his trousers. He tries to explain it all to his wife, who suspects he has simply fallen and struck his head. But local police discover inexplicable



ABOVE: Arthur C. Clarke's mysterious library – all these volumes seem to be written by him.

track marks in the ground, seemingly corroborating his report (see FT31:30, 56:48, 64:9, 189:29, 223:26, 273:26).<sup>17</sup>

Clarke is convinced that there must be many higher civilisations in our enormous and incredibly ancient Universe, and that it is reasonable to believe some may have visited us in the past. But if they were visiting today, why wouldn't the US and Soviet radars provide very obvious and public confirmation?

It's odd to watch a British UFO programme filmed before the Rendlesham Forest incident<sup>18</sup> and a discussion of aliens that predates the 1990s mania for abductions and anal probes. In 2021, we are entering a period of fresh interest in Unidentified Aerial Phenomena (as they are increasingly known) following the release of official Pentagon papers (FT408:2, 409:48-53). However, the vast majority of sightings remain "inconclusive" or "unexplained", with little evidence emerging of secret foreign technology, let alone extraterrestrials. Clarke concludes with a warning: "If you do meet a visitor, be very polite and be prepared for a long journey."

### The story so far

So, once again, we have had episodes focused on archaeological and astronomical questions, and – yes, again – our knowledge has moved forward and the mysteries have yielded somewhat to scientific process over time. But then we come to odd things seen in, or falling from, the skies. There is clearly a reason that Fort spent chapter after chapter dwelling on the fall of strange objects, and the scientific explanations offered by Clarke on television in 1980 and by scientists in the years since, still don't feel satisfactory. Meanwhile, the UFO mystery might have morphed into the 'UAP' mystery, but definitive answers remain elusive and a large body of witness testimony continues to demonstrate that ordinary people continue to experience the impossible.

Join me next time for the final part of this survey, in which I will cover episodes 11 to 13.



If you want to join in, I'd recommend buying the excellent 2008 Network DVD collection, which offers by far the best way to view this classic series.

(By the way, you can find a little production Easter Egg if you wind each episode back to 0, showing how the DVD was digitised from the original broadcast footage). Available from <https://networkonair.com/>

### NOTES

**1** At least for now. Fort was not a believer in the efficacy of scientific tests, although he accepted the possibility we might edge closer and closer to the "nearly real". I admit that my own efforts here are based entirely upon one generation of researchers pulling down the pants of their predecessors. I look forward to a future FT, in another 40 years, when still newer tests have undone all our hard work.

**2** [https://science.nasa.gov/science-news/science-at-nasa/2008/30/un\\_tunguska](https://science.nasa.gov/science-news/science-at-nasa/2008/30/un_tunguska).

**3** Ibid.

**4** [http://neo.jpl.nasa.gov/news/fireball\\_130301.html](http://neo.jpl.nasa.gov/news/fireball_130301.html)

**5** When Honeycombe asks: "What's the meaning of Stonehenge?" I am reminded of this song by Norwegian musical duo Yllvis: <https://youtu.be/mbyzgjee2mg>

**6** [www.livescience.com/45727-druids.html](http://www.livescience.com/45727-druids.html)

**7** [www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/stonehenge/history-and-stories/](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/stonehenge/history-and-stories/)

**8** See [www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-wiltshire-26417976](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-wiltshire-26417976) for a report featuring FT's own Paul Devereux.

**9** [www.newgrange.com/](http://www.newgrange.com/)

**10** <https://web.archive.org/web/20110606222725/http://www.playboy.com/articles/arthur-clarke-playboy-interview/index.html?page=2>

**11** [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthur\\_C.\\_Clarke](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthur_C._Clarke)

**12** See, for example, the confidence of the UK Met Office at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/3582802.stm>. Fort would have recognised this change in attitude.

**13** The series features footage of beautiful period vehicles throughout; if this is your

sort of thing, fill your boots.

**14** Throughout, narrator Gordon Honeycombe insists on pronouncing the famous acronym 'U-pho'.

**15** For more detail and possible explanations see: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kaikoura\\_lights](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kaikoura_lights)

**16** <https://wtop.com/local/2018/01/routine-drive-dc-area-man-makes-find-ages/>

**17** Taylor never changed his story. And now you can visit the site of his encounter on a signed trail through the Dechmont Woods: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-50262655>

**18** For more on the history of this sprawling and complex case see: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-suffolk-54649675> or Jenny Randles's columns in FTs *passim*.

**19** <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-highlands-islands-49495145>

**20** [https://youtu.be/A31u\\_q12d9E](https://youtu.be/A31u_q12d9E)

➡ **RYAN SHIRLOW** is a Northern Irish fortaean, writer and folk musician based in Leeds. You can find him online on Twitter: @ryanshirlow.



# SCARY STORIES FROM SCUNTHORPE

**ROB GANDY** continues his exploration of Lincolnshire weirdness, heading to the north of the county and the steel town of Scunthorpe, where he finds that this centre of modern industry is a surprising hotspot for anomalous activity, well supplied with strange spectral presences, hospital apparitions and phantom jaywalkers...



ABOVE: The view from Bristol Road, looking across the 'island' separating it from Scotter Road, where Katie and her mother saw the 12ft-tall monk.

When calling for witness testimonies concerning 'The Ruskington Horror'<sup>1</sup> (see FT401:32-38, 402:38-43), I was surprised to receive a story from Scunthorpe, which is an industrial town 45 miles (72km) away from Ruskington, in the north of the old county of Lincolnshire. But what a story it was! Such is the serendipitous nature of fortan research that I found myself chasing spectres amongst the famous steelworks (the local football team is not nicknamed The Iron for nothing.) This article details responses to the call that I made following on from the story<sup>2</sup> – but I should, of course, begin at the beginning with that initial story.

## THE SCOTTER ROAD SPECTRE

In 1999, 20-year-old Katie was living at home in Scunthorpe. Her bedroom window looked across Bristol Road to the main Scotter Road, which runs parallel and is separated by a

long 'island' of grass punctuated by trees and bushes. This stretch of Scotter Road is between the railway viaduct near Brumby Wood Lane and West Common Lane. Late one summer night, when it was dark and raining heavily, Katie's mum Catherine, popped into her bedroom for a chat.

Katie went to shut the curtains and gazed out the window and across to Scotter Road. As she did this, she saw something that made her stop what she was doing. She said to her mum: "Look at that idiot out there in the rain! It looks like he is on stilts. There must be a fancy-dress party or something somewhere." Her Mum came across and looked out of the window. Together, they watched what looked like a monk coming from their right. He was confidently and steadily striding along the flatter part of the grass verge, on the far side of the 'island' between the line of the trees and Scotter Road. He was heading south towards West Common Lane, and was quite clearly visible because he was lit by two streetlamps, which

are regularly spaced among the trees. His habit was brown, and definitely not black; and his hands were in front of his body as though tucked up inside the opposite arms' sleeves. The hood stood up in a point, which was surprising given the heavy rain, but they couldn't see his face because of the angle. However, what really flummoxed Katie and her mother was the fact that the monk appeared to be between 12 and 15 feet tall (3.6-4.6m). He was walking without difficulty, and they naturally assumed that he must be using stilts. They looked on in awe at this strange sight. Neither said anything initially, as they tried to make sense of what they were witnessing. Katie turned away first after, she guesses, two to three minutes, trying her best to dismiss what she had seen as some oddball in weird fancy dress. Catherine continued to watch and said that she saw the figure walk past a large bush, almost as if it was going into it – but it did not come out the other side, instead disappearing completely.





ABOVE: Scunthorpe in north Lincolnshire: a perhaps surprising location for such a rich seam of ghostlore. BELOW: The railway viaduct crossing Scotter Road

By the next day, Katie and Catherine agreed that what they had witnessed had been extremely odd, and that it could not have been someone in fancy dress. They compared notes and agreed on all points relating to the figure's height, the colour of the habit, the pointed hood, the gait (and how it looked as though stilts were being used), the heavy rain, the clarity of vision, as well as the very strange numbness that they both experienced at the time. Katie went over to the trees and took measurements, with Catherine looking on from Katie's bedroom window. It shocked them that these confirmed that the monk was certainly no less than 12 feet tall. In addition, using stilts would have been nigh on impossible in heavy rain because they would have undoubtedly sunk into the grass verge (and there were no holes to be seen). Countless times over the years Katie has said to her mum: "What we saw was weird! Why didn't I get a coat on and go over the road to it?" But Catherine always says that you don't think at the time: your mind cannot make sense of the situation. In their case, they were transfixed as the monk, or whatever it was, walked past until it was out of sight.

Neither Katie nor Catherine has broadcast their experience to others, but over the years they have overheard people share related stories. One involved a worker driving on the same stretch of road and seeing a monk in front of him. He slammed on his brakes and thought that he had run over the figure. He stopped and looked, but there was nothing

## SHE TRIED TO DISMISS WHAT SHE'D SEEN AS SOME ODDBALL IN FANCY DRESS

there – which is what really shook him. Others have had similar phantom jaywalker experiences, or have been puzzled by seeing people in fancy dress (some as Roman soldiers) on Scotter Road.

A good number of people have come forward with further testimonies from around the Scunthorpe area. Unfortunately, none of them related to 12-ft-tall monks, but each was fascinating in its own right and I set them out below. I should highlight that I have placed





a couple of the stories I received in other articles in this series if their subject matter seemed more appropriate there.<sup>3</sup>

### PHANTOM JAYWALKER 1: DONCASTER ROAD

Gurch Singh and his father were on their way to visit a family friend around 8pm one evening in September or October in the early 2000s. Gurch would have been 30 years old and his father 67. It was cold, dark and raining heavily; not a night to venture out unless you really had to. In fact, Gurch didn't fancy it, but as his dad doesn't drive it was left to him to act as chauffeur in his flat-fronted Mercedes Vito van. They were about four minutes into the journey, heading west on Doncaster Road, away from Scunthorpe town centre, on the stretch where High Ridge Secondary school (since renamed the St Lawrence Academy) is to the right, with its playing fields directly opposite on the other side of the road to the left. The roads were quiet and visibility low, with everything outside the headlight beams very dark despite some streetlights; there were lots of reflections from the water on the road, together with the wet windscreen. Gurch considers himself a relatively safe driver and recalls his speed being around 25mph (40km/h) due to the conditions.

The van design meant the two of them were sitting up higher and more erect than in a saloon car, which gave a good view of the road in front. However, the windscreen was covered in condensation and the noisy fan heater was blowing air on to it constantly. Gurch found himself peering attentively forward and was shocked when a man suddenly appeared in the headlight beams directly in front of them on their side of the road. He was only about 10 feet (3m) ahead of them, but there were no parked cars or properties that he could have

emerged from. He was part-facing the front of the van and then seemed to turn his body more towards it. Gurch and his father cannot remember any distinctive details about the man, because it happened so fast. The figure was definitely male and wearing dark clothing, possibly a dark jumper or jacket; he was not hunched over or wearing anything like a mackintosh, which one would expect someone to be wearing in such a downpour. Gurch slammed on the brakes, and tried to steer to the left behind the man, but the van skidded on the wet road with no chance of a dead stop on the slippery surface. As is often the case, it felt like a long time before they came to a halt. There was the dreadful moment when they had fully braced themselves for the inevitable impact – but it never came. They found it very odd, knowing that they must have struck and perhaps hurt the man, but then not hearing or feeling anything – no scream, no thud. As soon as it had happened, Gurch felt certain that his name was going to be splashed across the local papers for knocking someone over, perhaps even killing them.

He got out and circled the van, as there was nothing in the road to the front. Perhaps the man had thrown himself out of harm's way. But there was nobody on the ground, and no one in the street, and there was clearly no

opportunity for anyone to run or hide in the surrounding area; the school had tall metal fencing along its length on both sides of the road and there had been no time for someone to run to its end or clamber over and disappear from view. Fearing the worst, Gurch checked under the van, but thankfully there was nothing to be found. His instinct was to help the man they had seen – but he could find no evidence of anyone being there.

A couple of cars were approaching, so Gurch got back into the van and moved it to the side of the road. As he got in, his father was clearly alarmed and concerned about the accident and asked what had happened; he too had seen the man at the last moment before their emergency stop, close to the van with no hope of getting out of the way. It was baffling and upsetting. In retrospect, Gurch was pleased someone else had seen and experienced the whole event, as otherwise he might have dismissed it as some sort of waking dream.

Gurch braved the downpour to do a double check, getting soaked in the process. There was no damage to the front of the van and definitely no one lying in the road or by its side. Finally, they drove off. What had happened made no sense, and defied logical explanation. They had both clearly seen the same thing: the man appearing directly in their path and getting hit by the van. Yet in the instant the 'collision' happened – nothing happened; the man had vanished.

Later, they ran through their experience and realised that it was even more uncanny. Gurch definitely had not seen anyone moving into the road in front of the van: the man was just suddenly 'there', directly in its path and caught in the headlight beams; there was no sense of the figure walking, as if crossing the road. Also, the van's headlights would

THEY AGREED THAT  
WHAT THEY'D SEEN  
WAS A "FLOATY BLACK  
SHAPE LIKE A CLOAK"



ABOVE: Brumby Wood Lane, where Jane and her two friends had an alarming encounter with a phantom jaywalker or a "floaty black shape".





have made its approach quite visible to any pedestrians. Intriguingly, Gurch clearly didn't see the man react to the imminent collision he was about to experience; perhaps it was so sudden that he didn't have a chance to be alarmed. He didn't seem to register any fear or shock – it was as if the van was so close that he had no chance to respond, even to raise his arms. Even stranger, Gurch didn't recall that he looked very wet.

Gurch and his father rarely talked about the experience again, probably because it made them feel somewhat stupid having no way of explaining it. However, they were both 100 per cent certain that the man they saw that night could not have avoided being hit by the van, and even if he had managed to do so then there was no way for him to just vanish. To this day it has left Gurch fumbling for a clear answer; but having witnessed this strange event, he knows that there isn't one.

## PHANTOM JAYWALKER 2: BRUMBY WOOD LANE

The evening of Friday 29 November 2019 was clear and frosty in Scunthorpe. Jane (aged 74) and her two female friends (74 and 66) had been on a Christmas shopping coach trip from the town to the Trafford Centre in Manchester. It was about 9.40pm and Jane was driving her friends home in her Renault Captur. They were all chatting away when she turned off Kingsway on to the well-lit Brumby Wood Lane, heading for Scotter Road. They would have been travelling at 20-25mph (32-40km/h) miles per hour. Just then, about 50 yards (46m) ahead, Jane saw a figure dressed in black who appeared to be crossing the road in front of the car from left to right. She automatically braked, but as the figure reached the right-hand side of the road it simply disappeared. She says that she would have thought that it was a figment of her imagination, as it had been a long tiring day, but both of her friends saw it too.

Jane's friend in the back of the car said, "Oh! There's someone in the road!", to which her friend in the front passenger seat responded, "Yes, Jane's seen it – that's why she braked." The car didn't come to a complete



stop, and so they carried on, agreeing that the figure had disappeared into thin air (rather than into the trees and bushes on that side of the road). Given how close they were to the local crematorium they joked that "it must have been a ghost!" Looking back on the episode, Jane and the front seat passenger both agreed that what they saw was a kind of "floaty black shape, like a black cloak drifting across the road but with no head or legs visible". Interestingly, the friend in the back agreed with this description, but initially said that she remembered the figure as being white or grey. She later contacted Jane to say that she agreed that the figure was, in fact, black; she felt that she had originally said white or grey because she had convinced herself that what they saw was a ghost, and to her mind, ghosts were always perceived as light in colour. Perhaps this is evidence that witnesses' memories can be influenced by traditional conceptions or media portrayals of paranormal entities or events. Nevertheless, whatever it was that the three ladies saw, their experience fits neatly into the category of 'phantom jaywalker'.

## A GIANT CLOUDY CROSS

Dan Codd, a local writer and collector of Lincolnshire folklore and paranormal stories,<sup>4</sup>

LEFT: Scunthorpe General Hospital, home to a mysterious cloudy cross. BELOW: The entrance to Clarke's Woods from East Common Lane.

got in touch with me to tell me about a first-hand testimony he had from Wendy, whom he knows personally through mutual friends. Wendy used to work as a nurse at Scunthorpe General Hospital, starting in the early 1970s. At one point she found herself on Ward 6, where terminally-ill male patients were cared for. There was a large rectangular window on the ward, about which she was told was a very odd hospital tradition: that shortly after a patient died on the ward, a giant, white float-ing cross would appear outside this window. Apparently, it looked misty or cloudy, rather than 'solid', and it would evaporate after a certain amount of time. Talking in September 2017, Wendy said that this story had thoroughly unnerved her during her time on the ward. She never actually saw the strange white cross, despite habitually looking for it through the window the first few times someone died. Nevertheless, she was adamant that it was a sincerely held belief amongst hospital staff and not a 'ghost story' told out of boredom to frighten new recruits. She felt that rumours of the phantom cross were quite old, possibly dating back to WWII, because none of her colleagues claimed to have personally witnessed it. However, one colleague claimed to know that one of their predecessors, no longer working at the hospital, had "definitely" seen it a few years earlier, which would place the alleged sighting sometime in the late 1950s or early 1960s.

A thought that comes to mind is that perhaps it wasn't a ghostly sign of death that was seen by that particular witness but a UFO – whatever one of those may be – as many UFOs have been described as 'cross-shaped'. I guess we'll never know.

## 'OLD MAN CLARKIE'

There is a story, which might be local folklore, about an old man who used to live in a house in Clarke's Woods in Scunthorpe. Apparently local kids would tease him and he would chase them away. Unfortunately, the house burned down one day with the man inside, and so a story developed about 'Old Man Clarkie' haunting the woods. The foundations of the house might still be found.

One weekend in 1981 or 1982, George (pseudonym), who was 12 or 13 years old at the time, was one of a gang of lads who had gone into Clarke's Woods. It was early evening and they entered from East Common Lane intent on some adventure; they spent a lot of time in the woods, and would build camp fires, make swings and suchlike. There were eight of them in total: George, his brother, a friend and his brother, and four others named Steven, Philip, Robert and Kevin. The weather wasn't bad, as George remembers that he was not wearing a coat. They were walking along a lane that runs through the middle of the woods, on their way out, when George turned round to talk to his friends. Just then, he saw a





ghostly white smoky figure drifting across the lane from left to right about 80 yards (73m) behind them. He interpreted it as being 'Old Man Clarkie', and pointing behind them the only word he could utter was "Look!" They all turned and saw the spectre – and immediately ran as fast as they could without looking back. Once out of the woods they all agreed that they had seen the same thing. Could all of them have been wrong? Could it have been something as mundane as smoke, at the sight of which they all panicked because they had been primed to believe in 'Old Man Clarkie'? Or was it something paranormal?

### HEAD ROUND TO A CAVALIER

It was a clear, dry evening in September 2018 and Ian (pseudonym) was in the middle of a night shift, working as a track engineer for Network Rail at Scunthorpe railway station. He needed to write up some paperwork and

so was sitting alone in his van in the area near the western end of the station platform. Although it was night time, his surroundings were well lit, with street light levels of brightness. At one point, around 4am, he glanced up and saw a figure standing a car bonnet's length away from him in front of the van, as if it had come from his left, which would have been from across the railway. His initial thought was that this was someone in fancy dress: the tall and slim-built man had long hair and a goatee beard, and was wearing a big hat and what looked like a brownish cavalier outfit, with a big strap across his chest. (Ian doesn't remember any sign of a weapon). The man seemed to be aware of Ian as he looked straight at him before walking a few steps to the right – and vanishing into thin air.

Now, it is important to bear in mind that this was on railway property, and there are no paths where Ian was parked. The aerial view

(see picture below) shows a yellow dot where Ian's van was parked, and arrows which set out the direction in which the 'cavalier' walked. Ian was not scared by this experience – just totally baffled.

### FINAL THOUGHTS

Readers will readily appreciate why I had to expand my researches following receipt of multi-witness testimony about a 12-foot-tall monk strolling down Scotter Road in the pouring rain. I was delighted with the number and quality of experiences that came from respondents. Scunthorpe is not, perhaps, an obvious place to associate with fortaean phenomena – which only goes to suggest that weirdness is endemic across this sceptred isle (or should that be 'spectred isle'?). At some point I hope to repay the good citizens of Scunthorpe with a presentation detailing all of these local stories to raise funds for a local charity.

### NOTES

- 1 [www.lincolnshirelive.co.uk/news/local-news/haunted-stretch-lincolnshire-road-left-3455381](http://www.lincolnshirelive.co.uk/news/local-news/haunted-stretch-lincolnshire-road-left-3455381)
- 2 [www.grimsbytelegraph.co.uk/news/local-news/tall-ghost-fancy-dress-who-3617213](http://www.grimsbytelegraph.co.uk/news/local-news/tall-ghost-fancy-dress-who-3617213)
- 3 These testimonies are included in articles "Weird Wheels from the Wolds" (**FT407:48-51**) and "A Warning to the Fortean", to be published in a future issue.
- 4 The full testimony appears in Dan Codd's book *Paranormal Lincolnshire* (Amberley Publishing, 2020) ISBN: 9781445694993.

➡ **ROB GANDY** is a Visiting Professor at Liverpool Business School, Liverpool John Moores University and a regular contributor to FT. A lifelong fortaean, he has eclectic interests in all things weird, including phantom hitchhikers, ghosts, strange sports and folk customs, time slips and synchronicities.



TOP: Scunthorpe railway station. ABOVE: A map showing the position of Ian's parked van and the presumed path taken by the vanishing 'cavalier'.

# A TRUE STORY OF THE BACKPACKING TRIP FROM **HELL!**

Amazon Reviews

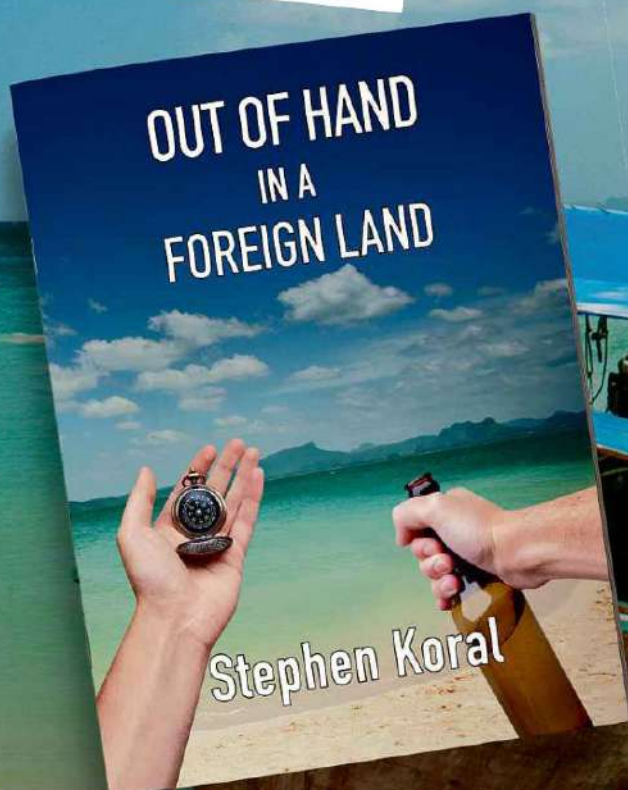
*"Precisely the novel we need in this year of isolation and curbed freedoms"*

*"Very funny and dark"*

*"Not your average travel book, far more than that"*

In his late twenties and appalled at the thought of doing a nine to five until he died, Stephen Koral bought a one-way ticket out of England to go and see the world. Embarking on a year long pub crawl across Asia with no fixed plans, the trip spiralled into a world of Indonesian prisons, police corruption, dodgy celebrities, and psychotic macaque monkeys. The nine to five didn't seem too bad after all.

Whether being chased by annoyed locals in India, getting completely lost in Sri Lanka, avoiding gun owners in Thailand, and possibly most dangerous of all - meeting his future wife, Koral tries to find humour in the difficult, but usually self-imposed troubles found backpacking alone on the road.



**Available on Amazon as paperback or eBook**



THE HIEROPHANT'S APPRENTICE PRESENTS

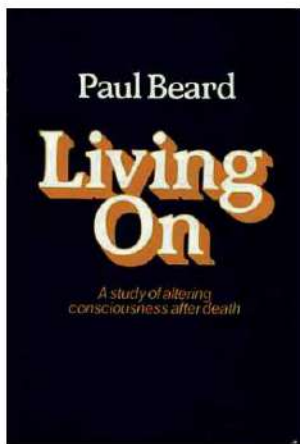
# BUILDING A FORTEAN LIBRARY

## NO 61. A GRACIOUS GUIDE TO THE AFTERLIFE

"Life after death will hardly be worth calling life if it remains merely static. That is one reason why nobody believes any more in the playing of harps." So writes our chosen author, the late Paul Beard – reminding one of the excellent Rabbi Isidore Epstein, who in his *Judaism* similarly scorned the idea that the hereafter might be spent "in sheer idleness". Judaism as a whole is really rather vague, undecided even, about whether there actually is an afterlife, and modern Christianity doesn't seem to have come up with a decent alternative to the harps, as far as we know. Beard's compact book, on the other hand, is pretty definite about the work we should expect to do on the 'other side', regardless of our Earthly religious predilections. Indeed, these and the preconceptions that go with them may sometimes be an obstacle to passing through the various states and stages he confidently describes. Which naturally leads to the question: *how* can Beard be so confident in his account?

Beard was a member of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) for a quarter of a century, and President of the College of Psychic Studies for 16 years. Unlike the SPR, the latter has a distinct corporate point of view, which is firmly of a spiritualist (not Spiritualist) persuasion. Beard thus had access to the full range of records of communications from the 'other side' – acquired through automatic writing, direct voice, ouija board, whatever – and sifted these for the reliability of both communicator and medium. He spends three chapters and 50-plus pages discussing and explaining his criteria. It is pretty dry stuff, but he does suggest that the reader can skip this part and go back to it at his leisure. If nothing else, one is reassured that Beard has impartially unearthed the most articulate and most trustworthy accounts that he can find. After that, the reader's on his or her own as to whether he or she believes what is here. Fairly obviously, there is no absolutely reliable way of knowing whether our mortality is a (dead) end, an utter cessation of consciousness, or a stepping stone to something else, new and strange. And to compound the difficulty, as Beard says, rather wryly: "Unfortunately, one consequence of dying is that one loses thereby some of one's credibility as a witness."

Nonetheless, these accounts are strangely compelling. One reason for this is that the afterlife he describes is quite logically structured, as we'll see.



Another is that across his spectrum of communicators, their reports show a remarkable consistency: they essentially agree on what happens to us in the hereafter, and in what order, and with what significance. And they do so in singular detail. On occasion, Beard says, the communicators get into arguments with their mediums, when the latter have other ideas as to what should happen to people after death. By avoiding specifics here, he may have missed an opportunity or two for comic relief. Ah well.

According to Beard's accretions of data from the communicators, the several stages through which the soul

passes after death are these. First, the surroundings change as one passes over. The 'traveller' or 'pilgrim' may find himself in a more or less strange or familiar place, or one related to the circumstances of his death. This can be bewildering. A soldier blown apart by a shell on the battlefield may find himself instantaneously in what seems to be a field hospital, and others from a higher level of this new existence will need to explain gently where he really is and how to adjust to it. (People who die in great pain are immediately free from their suffering, incidentally.) One lady related how she found herself with her father in a replica of her family home, where she had been especially happy; she needed little time to adjust. Once acclimatised to this new state of affairs, the 'pilgrim' realises that his surroundings are malleable, "ideoplastic". Most would appear to find themselves in a pleasant sunlit landscape in good company. It appears there is no diurnal cycle: rest is taken, but apparently not sleep. Here is another adaptation to make: initially feeling hunger and thirst, and having no physical body to satisfy them, nor need to do so. But this is a malleable environment, so presumably one can conjure a platter of rum truffles and a bottle of good Barsac, if only for old times' sake.

In our debauched youth, we thought we'd be happy in Summerland for a very long time – consuming *haute cuisine* and wines from the finest vintages, swanning about in the Bentley or out on the yacht. This *could* go on forever. Beard reports on a group of monks from Lindisfarne who, nine (Earthly) centuries after passing over, were still contentedly minding their sheep, drinking their mead, and awaiting the Second Coming. And why not? But clearly there is a fairly hefty qualitative difference between their simple satisfied lives and our own louche imaginings, even granting the illusory nature of both (a point Beard is keen to stress). One is the product of profound faith and selfless conviction, the other the product of triviality, narcissism and turpitude (common human failings in those of immature years). If one lived one's Earthly life on those principles one would probably find oneself in the dark, stony, inhospitable afterworld of Winterland,



there to contemplate where one went wrong and perhaps eventually recognise the illusory nature of the life one has led and the place one is in. Winterland is a kind of hell where the only demons are one's own. Presumably Hitler and his ilk are still scheming and ranting there. Both Winterland and Summerland are states one has to grow out of through accumulating self knowledge. In this, as in all stages of the afterlife, we will have the assistance of older and wiser souls.

As the 'pilgrim' comes to recognise the illusory, and hence spiritually impoverished, nature of Summerland, he comes to understand that the illusions and dissatisfactions are also the products of his own nature. To begin to grow spiritually, he must next confront that nature. He must now ready himself to enter the phase of The Judgement. This is rather less scary than being confronted by St Peter at the pearly gates, let alone the doom of the Great Day of Judgement itself, so beloved of the world's more oppressive religions. Nor is it final: the lessons of the Judgement can be built on in later stages of the afterlife. Beard suggests it is more like a stock-taking; and while it involves facing one's mistakes and shortcomings – and their consequences – it is also an occasion for reviewing one's positive, "expansive and liberating" qualities. What happens is: the 'pilgrim' goes through a kind of panorama of his Earthly life, in minutest detail. He will be helped in this by an 'advanced spirit instructor'. Events are shown in reverse order, so that the pilgrim can better understand the early seeds of his later behaviour. Besides what he has done, said, thought and felt in his life, he is obliged to experience the reaction of others to his deeds. This, says Beard, is "surprising and very disconcerting", which one can well imagine, be the deeds good or bad. Dealing with the latter may be revelatory, but it is not easy. One communicator said: "There are some very unpleasant moments to pass through, I can assure you," while another remarked more grimly of her own anguish: "You do not get any mitigation." The whole process is more of a series of experiences, set against the background first of Summerland and later the next layer of being, rather than a singular event like a (rather weird) visit to the dentist. One has to work through and purge oneself of one's misdeeds, mistakes and wonky thinking, using one's better nature to learn from them and develop one's 'spiritual muscles' before being able to gain access to the next level of the afterlife. One gains nothing here that has not been earned.

As his spiritual strength and awareness grows, the pilgrim is able to move into the next layer of consciousness – the First Heaven. Now one has "the freedom to discover himself to be a much larger being than he has so far known." Beard says that: "Such a process is best looked upon as a *transference* from one area of one's consciousness to a larger area. As



## "LEISURE WITHOUT BOOKS IS DEATH, AND BURIAL OF A MAN ALIVE."

Lucius Annaeus Seneca

this realisation takes place, the former consciousness will gradually melt away as irrelevant." In the First Heaven, "much attention will now be given to study of spiritual laws and to exploring the inner side of subjects already well known and loved while on Earth." Frustratingly, Beard offers no information about these spiritual laws. But, armed with such insights, the pilgrim is now able to repay his learning by giving telepathic inspiration, in daylight or in dreams, to those still on Earth.

The question must have occurred to readers earlier, but only now does Beard raise the question "whether any equivalent to sexual union exists after death." Obviously, it can't in any strictly carnal fashion, since the ethereal or astral soul lacks the necessary declivities and appendages. Lust, as such, is obviated. TE Lawrence, on Earth painfully confused and inhibited in such matters, discovered (as had many, in Earthly life, before him) that "the basis of all relationships is purely emotional" and explains that sexual union is "an interfusion of the two bodies and an ecstatic and satisfying experience far more lovely than anything one could experience in an earthly body." Another communicator describes it as "a sort of temporary merging of one with another". Not so different in kind then from what we may experience in this life, but presumably far more intensely felt – which defeats the imagination: but those on the other side have only *our* words to convey their sense.

The difficulty of communication between 'there' and 'here' is hardly a new one. Frederick Myers famously lamented how "I appear to be standing behind a sheet of frosted glass, which blurs sight and deadens sound, dictating feebly to a reluctant and somewhat obtuse secretary. A feeling of terrible impotence burdens me." This no doubt explains why as Beard's account of the hereafter continues he becomes increasingly vague about specifics – although not so vague as to deprive us of surprises. For between the First and Second Heavens intrudes the unexpected: the Second Death. This involves shedding most of what we associate with our identity, notably "memories of the experiences, thoughts and feelings" that make up our sense of self. But at this point in the afterlife, one realises that the self has become as much a burden as an ailing physical body may have been. What one is casting away is the *personality*, not the true self. "Now," says Beard, the pilgrim "has to find his *individuality* – that which is undivided from the spiritual realities [that] lie around him in a still somewhat hidden form." The old self is "lost and forgotten in a great humility". The Second Death is not a cataclysm, but a "loosening process, a gradual letting go, a slipping off of what has hitherto seemed oneself." Communicators describe this as a blessed release and relief.

And so one comes to the Second Heaven with an expanded identity. The major revelation here is that the individual has lived not one but many previous Earthly lives. So the task now is to prepare for one's next incarnation. The many lessons one has learned so far in the afterlife will then go into deciding what aspects of one's character need to be confronted and/or refined in the next life. Equally important (and we can see now why the personality had to be shed) is the realisation that one is part of a group soul, which has an identity of its own, "companions of the spirit" whom one will have met – for better or for worse – in previous incarnations. "All the real concepts of incarnate living," writes Beard, "can only be understood in terms of growing unification, of a life that is less and less separative." Paradoxes abound here.

There is a Third Heaven, which one may enter, or only glimpse, before or after a further incarnation, full of souls of greater refinement and perfection, ready to guide the pilgrim onward in his journey. Ultimately, one may dissolve into what Western minds would probably call the Godhead.

This is a short but comprehensive book, but not to be read in a hurry: every sentence counts. Given that we all have to die, and that death is life's greatest uncertainty, it is also a profoundly fortifying work. And after all – it might all be true!

Paul Beard, *Living On*, George Allen & Unwin 1980



■ Raised: £265.00  
■ Needed: £622.10



■ Raised: £640.00  
■ Needed: £572.48

# WHOSE LIFE WILL YOU CHANGE WITH AN INVESTMENT OF JUST £15?

At CARE International, we know that sometimes, all people need is a little investment to change their lives forever.

That's why we've set up this revolutionary new way to help some of the world's poorest people. It's called Lendwithcare – and instead of giving a donation, you can lend from just £15 to fund a fledgling business.

Gloria and Vor Thoun are just two of the people you could help to work their way out of poverty when you make a loan at [lendwithcare.org](http://lendwithcare.org).

## How does it work?

- 1 You choose an entrepreneur at [www.lendwithcare.org](http://www.lendwithcare.org)
- 2 You invest any amount from £15 in their business
- 3 The entrepreneur's business begins to grow
- 4 Your loan is repaid back to you
- 5 You re-invest in another entrepreneur, you withdraw your money or donate it to CARE International

**VISIT [LENDWITHCARE.ORG](http://LENDWITHCARE.ORG) NOW  
TO MEET MORE ENTREPRENEURS  
AND DECIDE WHO YOU INVEST IN**

**[lendwithcare.org](http://lendwithcare.org)**  
Microloans from CARE International UK

CARE International UK. Registered charity no 292506. CARE, 89 Albert Embankment, London SE1 7TP  
The loan status and amounts required were correct at the time of creating this advertisement.

  
**care**  
Defending dignity.  
Fighting poverty.



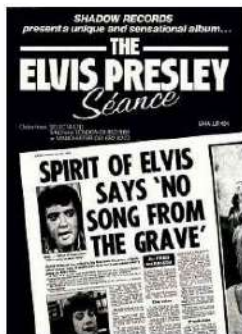
## The Return of the King

**KATE CHERRELL** recalls  
Elvis Presley's post-  
mortem visit to Watford...

**T**he King isn't dead. Or so countless eyewitnesses would have us believe. Not a day goes by since Elvis Presley's demise in 1977 that someone hasn't spotted the ageing rocker in a branch of Walmart or sunning himself in some exclusive resort. Yet for all the theories that insist upon Elvis's continuing corporeal presence, a hundred more cite psychic or ghostly interactions that offer proof of Elvis's immortal soul. A chat with Presley's shade has been claimed by TV ghost hunters, tourists and Presley family members alike, with Priscilla claiming to catch up with her deceased former spouse on a regular basis.

One of the oddest responses to the King's passing came two years after his death and 4,362 miles (7,020km) from Memphis, when a Spiritualist church in Watford hosted one of the strangest public séances in history. They would contact Elvis, and what's more, they'd record and release it on LP.

What must be one of the most bizarre Elvis-related products, *The Elvis Presley Séance*, was recorded on 24 July 1979 (the second anniversary of his death) with an optimistic 5,000 vinyl records pressed thereafter. Stranger still, this was not the first of its type. A year earlier, American psychic David Behr released the album *A Séance With Elvis (The King Lives on and Talks to the World from Beyond the Grave)*. The séance took place on 1 December 1978 where "for almost one heart-stopping hour Elvis Presley through David Behr spoke to the world". In that hour, Elvis answered over 65 questions and covered topics as diverse as "his death", "the UFO phenomenon", and (with a spectacular lack of



self-awareness), "people exploiting his name".

However, it is the home-spun spiritual earnestness of Elvis in Watford that concerns us here. Presley spoke through medium Carmen Rogers, who conveyed the King's wisdom to the assembled crowd. She had reportedly contacted Jack the Ripper a few years before, with her account published in *Reveille* magazine. In 1975, she was brought into Heathrow airport to investigate sightings of a "bowler-hatted ghost" who alarmed passengers and staff alike by walking on the main runway. With Rogers's assistance, they determined that the supposed ghost was that of a man who'd died in a plane crash in 1948 and was still searching for his lost briefcase "because it contained details of a deal he had just completed abroad". After Rogers' mediumistic efforts, the spectre of businessman "Thomas Alpert" was not seen again.

Joining Rogers in the Watford hall were DJ Stuart Colman, who narrated the experience, two reporters and a photographer from the *Sunday People*, the director of Shadow Records, musicians, recording engineers, a producer, a small gathering of friends and family, and Theresa Currie, a representative of the Official Elvis Presley Fan Club. The 'unedited' nature of the séance was emphasised in the marketing – the record boasted that "we simply

let the tapes roll and recorded everything as it happened." Sadly, the séance has the spiritual profundity of a *Bullseye* pre-game interview. The recording opens with brief introductions to a few of the attendees, focusing on softly-spoken, 30-year-old Theresa Currie. Ever since she'd won an Elvis record at a childhood birthday party, she'd been obsessed with the King, travelling to America to see him perform in person. In one Alan Partridge-like exchange about how she financed the trip, the probing DJ calls Currie a "freak" for her 40-show streak.

Rogers's mediumship takes place in a fully lit hall with disclaimers aplenty. She would not enter a trance, but field communications through a clairaudient link with the King. All of his messages were to be taken with a pinch of Memphis salt, as the sitters shouldn't "expect to get everything correct, because it's got to filter through me".

Rogers offered no surprising insights into Elvis's life and consciousness, but touched on known afflictions, such as his nervous condition and splitting headaches. News stories relating to his estate were discussed, with each half-statement given to superfan Currie for fact-checking. Sadly, Elvis appeared to be in a rush – he probably had many more séances to visit that evening – and Rogers insisted on a quick-fire round of questioning, fielding amusingly dull queries such as "What kind of magazines did Elvis read?" ("I don't think he read a great deal at all") or "What was the Christmas present that Elvis gave Lisa in '76 that she still uses when she's at Graceland?" The reply to the latter was upheld as the triumph of the evening; Rogers's initial vision was of silver, but after some leading back and forth, the circle agreed that she had indeed channelled the correct answer of "a golf buggy".

The sensation of listening to the séance is a curious one; the death of Elvis was not yet an historical

reference point, but a recent blow, with devoted fans still in mourning. However, Rogers leads the evening with all the authority of an exhausted schoolmistress. Throughout her channelling, she huffs and sighs; and comments such as "Oh God, he's gone all emotional again – that doesn't help," turn what could have been a fascinating study into the nature of belief and cultural idolatry into a dull, low-budget farce. Asked if Elvis is happy to be reunited with his parents in Heaven, she answers with a sigh: "Well, happy as they can be. They're trying to sort a few things out." While *The Elvis Presley Séance* might not have made waves in the field of psi research, it remains a fascinating snapshot of a time when our credulity and keenness to cling to pop icons was at fever pitch.

The LP sold few copies, with most consigned to bargain bins shortly after release. The strange affair was covered by a modest article in the *Sunday People*, which was subsequently used by Shadow Records to promote the record, with little success. Few, it seemed, believed Elvis would have any interest in being summoned to Watford by a small assembly of believers. Not only were none of the attendees personally known to the singer, but he had never visited London in life, so a sudden excursion in death seemed unlikely.

As poorly as the release performed, séances with the King remain popular, with annual attempts to make contact occurring on the anniversaries of his birth and death, with varying claims of success. However, the days of vinyl-pressed séances are behind us. At least, experiencing the drudgery of *The Elvis Presley Séance*, we can only hope so.

◆ KATE CHERRELL is a writer and academic specialising in 19th century Spiritualism. She recently completed a PhD in Spiritualism in the Gothic and curates the blog [BurialsandBeyond.com](http://BurialsandBeyond.com).



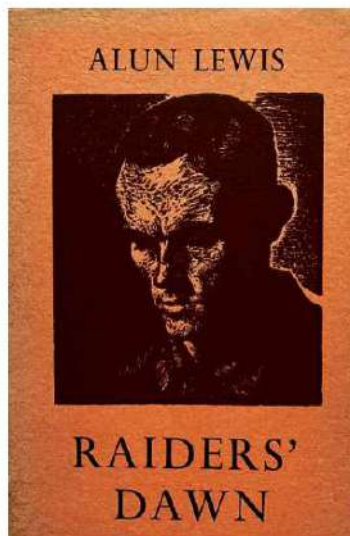
## “Time is no stream to get fixed in”

Welsh poet Alun Lewis met an untimely death in WWII, but enjoyed a post-mortem career via the automatic writing of novelist Elizabeth Berridge. ERIC HOFFMAN looks at a strange episode from literary history.

At the outbreak of World War II, Alun Lewis (born 1 July 1915), joined the British Army Corps of Royal Engineers, though soon after changed his commission to an infantry battalion. Lewis died unexpectedly on 5 March 1944 while stationed in Burma, during a military campaign against the Japanese. He was 28 years old.

Official reports written by the Army court, perhaps fearful of upsetting his family, and due to religious taboos, charitably claim that Lewis died accidentally – he stumbled off a hill and his firearm discharged and caused a fatal injury – though in fact all that is known is that he was discovered outside the latrine, freshly shaven, with a bullet wound in his head and a revolver in his hand. Six hours later, he succumbed to his injury. Letters and poems written just before the incident seem to indicate his distressed state of mind.

In 1941, just prior to his joining the military, Lewis married Gweno Ellis, a schoolteacher. His marriage somewhat alleviated his ongoing psychological maladies. While stationed in India with the South Wales Borderers, a line infantry regiment of the British Army, in 1942, he had a passionate love affair with Freda Ackroyd, a married woman, and this may have contributed to his suicide – though, as a socialist, working-class native of the Cynon Valley in Wales, Lewis was also troubled by disparities between the



### Contact was made entirely through the medium of words

lower- and upper-class soldiers; the dehumanisation of military protocol; and the possibility of a violent death at the hands of an enemy depicted by British propaganda as mercilessly inhuman. In his poem “Karanje Village” Lewis wrote:

And Love must wait, as the unknown yellow poppy  
Whose lovely fragile petals are unfurled  
Among the lizards in this wasted land.  
And when my sweetheart calls me shall I tell her  
That I am seeking less and less of world?  
And will she understand?

While in the Army, Lewis continued to write prolifically, composing many poems and short

stories. In 1941, in collaboration with the woodcut artists John Petts and Brenda Chamberlain, Lewis published the ‘Caseg broadsheets’, featuring poetry by Welsh poets Dylan Thomas and Lynette Roberts, among others. The broadsheets were intended to be literature affordable by the masses, though without adequate funds the project failed to reach its intended audience.

The following year, Lewis published two volumes: *Raiders’ Dawn* and other poems and *The Last*

*Inspection*, a collection of short stories. Two books were published posthumously: *Hal Hal Among the Trumpets* (1945), a collection of poems, and *Letters from India* (1946), a powerful collection of wartime correspondence. Lewis’s writings – in particular his more accomplished poems, notably “All Day it has Rained”, “To Edward Thomas”, “Song (on seeing dead bodies floating off the Cape)”, and “Raiders’ Dawn” – gradually gained a small yet devoted following. Lewis is now considered, along with Keith Douglas, one of the finest English poets of World War II. His fiction is equally celebrated, with critic AL Rowse declaring *The Last Inspection* to be the “finest [collection of short stories] to come out of the war.”

One Lewis admirer was Elizabeth Berridge, a part-Welsh, struggling London-born writer who, together with her husband Reginald Moore, founder and editor of several literary journals, moved to Wales to raise their children. They lived there from

1943 to 1951. It was during this time that Berridge, then a housewife, began to pursue a serious writing career. Her stories primarily concerned the domestic experience of English middle-class women.

In the years after World War II, in which Great Britain suffered over 800,000 civilian and military casualties, many aggrieved survivors turned to psychics, Spiritualists, and mediums in order to make contact with fallen friends and family. Berridge and Moore, convinced that the body transcends death and moves freely between existences and planes, and that spirits who leave someone in grief and do not make amends cannot leave the mortal plane, began to attend séances in London in 1953.

During an initial séance, the medium made the announcement that contact had been made with someone named Alun Lewis, and asked if anyone present was familiar with that name. Moore and Berridge responded that they knew of him, as Moore had in 1941 included a poem and three stories in a reprint anthology and Berridge, acting as secretary for the publication, had briefly corresponded with Lewis. Several nights after this séance, Berridge, in the comfort of her Regent’s Park home at 3 Kent Terrace,<sup>1</sup> decided to attempt a private communication with Lewis and, much to her surprise, when she put pen to paper, the pen began to move on its own accord and in a handwriting style quite different from hers. Contact with Lewis had apparently been established.<sup>2</sup>

Lewis told Berridge that he wished to write several short stories and poems, works that remained unfinished at his death. At first, Berridge was resistant; she brushed aside the immediate possibility that she had merely imagined contact with Lewis, and was therefore mentally unstable, and was concerned that the resultant stories might not reflect her own artistic inclinations. She



ABOVE LEFT TO RIGHT: Alun Lewis, Elizabeth Berridge and Gweno Lewis.

decided to give herself over to this apparent spirit, and to write automatically. She heard no voice and saw no apparition; contact was made, appropriately enough, entirely through the medium of words. Berridge later compared the experience to like “being in a car that is slightly out of control, in a skid one can guide but not master.”

After completion of a story or poem, the two would converse, via written exchanges, about its relative merits or problems. Lewis was extremely self-critical, and would remove whole sections of poems, particularly if they seemed to him overly sentimental. The channelling also had aspects of physical possession, as he would comment on sensations, such as the feel of her pen. Moreover, he showed concern about Berridge’s health and mental well-being, and would comment that he felt he was an unwanted burden on her. Moore, it seems, was supportive of her communication with Lewis, and was present during a number of these sessions, communicating with Lewis via Berridge.

The Lewis-penned stories Berridge channelled were simple enough: “The Lost Man” concerns a Lt Manners, who, while visiting a colonel’s wife at an Indian outpost, is joined by her sister and later by the colonel. Manners is made uncomfortable by women, yet he and the sister manage to hit it off. It is a rather dry exercise, quite unlike Lewis’s Chekhovian short stories.

Another, “The Boychick”, is a shaggy dog story concerning a Welsh coal miner’s affection for an overweight female barkeep. The poems are decidedly romantic and overly flowery and sentimental, more like Lewis’s juvenilia, perhaps illustrating Berridge’s lack of poetic skill. Yet there is the occasional memorable line; for example, the evocative “Time is no stream to get fixed in”.

Berridge copied down several Lewis poems dedicated to Gweno, one of which, as biographer John Pikoulis notes, recalls the penultimate verse of his poem “Bequest”, written at Easter 1943 but not published until 1966, a poem of his childhood:

I leave you in their company,

The winter snow heaped on your door

In the dark house in the mountains

With a robin on the floor.<sup>3</sup>

Lewis subsequently requested that Berridge send one of the poems to Gweno, “and tell her that I am happy” and “not to weep for me”. Initially, Berridge, though she believed making amends to be integral to a spirit’s ability to move on, was cautious about this request. A number of years had passed, yet Gweno was a widow, and Berridge had no idea how she might respond to such an unsolicited correspondence, particularly given its basis in the supernatural. Nevertheless, Berridge did eventually write to Gweno, explaining to her that she and her husband had

discovered the “lively realisation that there are whole planes of existence beyond this one, so that life does not end on the edge of darkness,” that theirs is no “idle hobby,” and that they “have been investigating various phenomena coolly and speculatively, meeting... trustworthy mediums.” As a result of these activities, and the fact that Berridge was a writer, Lewis had chosen her as a vessel for communication from the afterlife. (There was also the fact that, as Lewis explained to Moore, Berridge’s “vibrations... were right” for Lewis. “Everything is done by vibrations,” Lewis helpfully explained.) Berridge also informed Gweno that she had quizzed Lewis as to how many children he had; he responded that he had a son named Curig, born in 1944. Pikoulis observes that, by a stunning coincidence, the daughter of Wallace and Freda Ackroyd (Lewis’s lover), Juliette, was born in 1944, and that Curig, “one of the minor saints, is venerated in conjunction with his mother, with whom he was always associated. Her name is Juliette.”

Surprisingly, Gweno was receptive to Berridge’s letter; she later visited Berridge in London, and the two conducted several sessions together with a medium. Berridge encouraged Lewis to speak to Gweno via a medium, yet he seemingly resisted. “Believe me that would never satisfy her,” he responded to Berridge’s entreaties. “She would want to

probe and become immersed in it or disbelieve completely. I feel she must be left alone.”

Eventually, Lewis stopped using Berridge as a medium for composition. In all, he communicated only a handful of poems and stories. Perhaps he sensed her discomfort, or the supply of material had run dry. “Life,” he wrote via Berridge, “is all a complicated interweaving of passions, actions, reactions – like soundwaves spreading up into the atmosphere widening, thinning, but never dying completely away. I am glad to be free of that parcelling up of time.” The two continued to correspond for some time before Lewis’s final communication in December 1956. Ultimately, the cessation of contact was to Berridge’s psychic relief. She had her own writing career and her children to look after, and Lewis had become a burden. Still, the experience, however curious, enriched and rewarded her, and it confirmed for Berridge and Moore the continued existence of consciousness after death and the sincerity of Spiritualist practices.

All quotations are taken from John Pikoulis, *Alun Lewis: A Life*, Mid Glamorgan, Wales: Seren, 1985, pp. 282-293.

#### NOTES

**1** The home was owned by poet John Hall. In one of the many curious examples of coincidence, Yvette Roberts, with whom Alun Lewis corresponded in 1941 when Roberts requested poems for an anthology edited by her husband Kiedrich Rhys (whose work was also published in a Caség broadsheet), following their divorce, rented the apartment upstairs. They were friendly, but not close. Neither recalls discussing Lewis.

**2** This was not Lewis’s first spirit communication, apparently. According to Pikoulis, Freda Ackroyd attended a séance in Coonoor one month after Lewis’s death. At that time, he was remarkably reticent, issuing only one brief statement: “Don’t go my way, Freda”.

**3** Alun Lewis, *Collected Poems*, ed. Cary Archard, Mid Glamorgan, Wales: Seren, 1995, p191.

➤ **ERIC HOFFMAN** is the editor of *Conversations with John Berryman* (2021) and the author of *Oppen: A Narrative* (2013, rev. ed. 2018), a biographical study of poet George Oppen. He lives in Connecticut and is a frequent contributor to *FT*.

# OPEN YOUR MIND WITH THE WORLD OF STRANGE PHENOMENA **ForteanTimes**

**SUBSCRIBE TODAY AND GET 3 ISSUES FOR £1**

You'll need a sense of adventure, curiosity, natural scepticism and good humour if you want in on the action.

Every month, **Fortean Times** takes you on an incredible and somewhat twisted journey where you'll discover the most fantastic phenomena on earth.

## **YOUR PHENOMENAL OFFER:**

- **Get your first 3 issues for £1**
- **SAVE up to 13% on the shop price** if you continue your subscription
- Enjoy your subscription either **in print** or **digitally on your favourite device**
- **FREE delivery to your door** before it hits the shops



**NOW AVAILABLE ON YOUR DIGITAL DEVICE**

Visit [dennismags.co.uk/forteanimes](http://dennismags.co.uk/forteanimes) quoting code **P2021D**



# REVIEWS / BOOKS

TO SEND REVIEW COPIES, CONTACT THE BOOK REVIEWS EDITOR AT DVBARRETT@FORTEANTIMES.COM



## The body, real and imaginary

**Ross MacFarlane** delights in an erudite yet playful exploration of the rebelliousness and unpredictability of the human body

### The Body Fantastic

Frank Gonzalez-Crussi

MIT Press 2021

Pb, 264pp, £24, ISBN 9780262045889

Sometimes you can grasp the essence of a book by its cover. Frank Gonzalez-Crussi's *The Body Fantastic* is adorned by anatomical drawings – the bones of a human leg, the stomach of a wombat – juxtaposed with illustrations of the natural world, both real and mythic, from a frog to a squid, to a mermaid.

This arrangement might sound peculiar at first, but it proves to be a perfect visual representation of the author's view that the idea of "the body" flits between the real and imaginary.

Inspired by the ideas of French poet and philosopher Paul Valéry, the author sees the body as more than just something to be gazed on in a mirror (the first body), regarded by others (the second), or probed by doctors (the third).

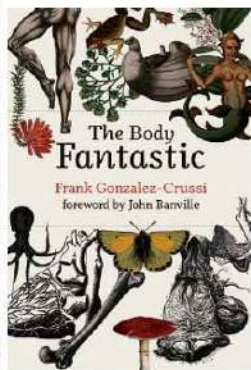
For Gonzalez-Crussi, the fourth body – "the body fantastic" – is a liminal concept, rich in symbolic meanings.

In its seven chapters, *The Body Fantastic* sets out to chart this territory in ruminative and inquisitive style, considering how aspects of our bodies have been perceived through time, selecting from the clinical record extreme examples and seemingly strange behaviours. Thankfully, however, Gonzalez-Crussi manages to avoid making the book a collection of factoids, or a salacious rummage for the weirdest occurrences.

He writes: "My purpose is not to compile a collection of medical curiosities or events worthy of a roadside freak show. I wish ... to demonstrate the body's inherent rebelliousness

and unpredictability." Alert to its potential oddities, he manages instead to provide a lively but thoughtful meditation on the subject matter.

He begins his journey with the uterus – "the only organ that has been constituted as an independent being", as he notes – showing how Græco-Roman medicine envisioned the womb as a mobile part of a woman's body. For Gonzalez-Crussi even though notions of the "wandering womb" were disproven by the 1700s, the after-effects of the idea – and its marking of the female body as being something inferior to the male – lived on in misogynistic definitions of "the feminine mind" which rose in the 18th century, and of "hysteria" in the 19th century.



From there we move to the second chapter's explorations of ravenous stomachs, firstly encountering the Rev William Buckland and his son Francis, the latter of whom is partly remembered for his forteen classic, *Curiosities of Natural History* (1868). What Gonzalez-Crussi focuses on instead, however, are the pair's omnivorous eating habits; "to

### "Historical gobbler" *Jacques de la Falaise's* *performance* *culminated in* *swallowing a live eel*

them, Noah's Ark looked like a dining menu".

The cast of the rest of the chapter includes Roman emperors, deep-sea organisms only consisting of digestive systems and participants in modern-day speed eating contents in the United States.

Such is the way of much of this erudite yet playful book: while you may not always be sure of the destination at the beginning of each chapter, you welcome the journey in the author's cheerful and knowledgeable company.

In the third chapter we're ingesting the curative powers of our own bodies from across cultures: whether this be the healing powers of saliva and urine, cures attributable to human corpses, or the symbolism of transplantation.

Gonzalez-Crussi's criss-crossing of sources and contexts also allows him to ponder the ethics of "the body fantastic": chapter four asks whether hair is refuse to be discarded or a distillation of the essence of the human, a question brought into focus by debates over displaying the hair of Holocaust survivors in the Auschwitz-Birkenau museum.

The style of the chapters also alters at times. A discussion of aquatic-terrestrial beings in chapter five only focuses on two accounts from Spain and Italy when, as the author, admits, the notion is a near-universal myth.

A range of different sources

is offered up in chapter six for a look at how concepts of pain and pleasure play out on the body fantastic's feet, in notions of both gout and sexual fetishisation.

The book's last chapter brings us back to the topic of digestion, peering down the throats of those who eat objects without any nutritional benefit. We meet two "historical gobblers" in pre-Revolutionary France: Jacques de la Falaise, whose performance culminated in swallowing a live eel, and a Monsieur Tarare, whose swallowing abilities were "used to transmit secret war correspondence".

We also encounter the disorder trichotillophagia – the compulsive eating of hair – the nature of which, Gonzalez-Crussi reminds us, is still a matter of dispute.

*The Body Fantastic* is a small tome, and there are perhaps topics that the engaged reader would like to see covered in a slightly longer volume.

Crucially, Gonzalez-Crussi fails to ponder how the role of gender affects our conceptualisations; after all, how much of our "second body" might be one viewed through predominantly male eyes? How often is this same gaze viewing the medical "third" body? And how much of a male gaze has perceived and created the many bodies fantastic Gonzalez-Crussi discusses in his book?

On that, our prolix author appears a little tongue-tied.

Nonetheless, for a work of around 250 pages, it is a fine achievement that offers limitless possibilities for further exploration.

After all, is there a part of the body that doesn't have a symbolic quality attached to it?

# Marking time

**James Holloway** explores how the passage of time is revealed in maps through the ages

## Time in Maps

**From the Age of Discovery to Our Digital Era**

Kären Wigen & Caroline Winterer eds  
University of Chicago Press 2020  
Hb, 231pp, £34, ISBN 9780226178590

Although we tend to think of maps as a way of representing space, we actually use them for much more, including the depiction of time. In *Time in Maps*, Kären Wigen and Caroline Winterer collect nine papers that look at different ways in which cartographers and others have tried to use maps to depict history and prehistory.

In the book's first section William I Ranking argues that modern maps can represent change over time effectively. The next two papers focus on maps from early modern Asia: Kären Wigen discusses the ways in which historical mapmaking in Japan played an important role in statecraft, as well as addressing local topics and addressing current events, while Richard A Pegg talks about the role of mapmaking concepts introduced into China by Jesuits in the 16th century. The indirect influence of these Jesuit maps can be seen in maps from the Qing dynasty of the 18th century; via Qing influence, these ideas also spread to Korea.

In the second section, Barbara E Mundy explores the historical maps of post-conquest Mexico; created by indigenous mapmakers, these maps recalled earlier constructs of time and space that focused on meaning, not topography. Veronica Della Dora's paper discusses the common image in Baroque cartography of the veil – images

of the figure of Time lifting a veil to reveal the map were common in maps and illustrations from the early modern Netherlands as well as from Venice. Finally, Daniel Rosenberg discusses an unconventional kind of map – the linguistic diagrams of 17th-century scholar John Wilkins, who attempted to chart the structure of English.

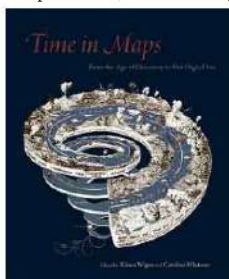
Caroline Winterer's paper addresses attempts by mapmakers, psychologists and artists to grapple with the new ideas of “deep time” gaining currency in the 19th century. In the United States, new ideas about the age of the Earth interacted with Americans' sense of themselves as a young nation, producing a fascination with the age of the American landscape. Susan Schulten charts the development of time-mapping in the United States, which changed over the 19th century, reflecting changing American views of the nation's history.

Finally, James R Akerman looks at battlefield maps and battlefield tourism, and in particular at the ways in which battlefield maps have changed over time to reflect changes in the way travellers interact with the

sites they depict.

*Time in Maps* is a fascinating look at some of the many ways in which humans have tried to depict the passage of time in cartographic form. The handsome hardback is illustrated throughout with colour images of historical maps. As the product of an academic conference, it might be a little too specialised for the casual map enthusiast, but for those fascinated by the history and modern implications of map-making, it's rewarding reading.

★★★★★



## Mars

Stephen James O'Meara

Reaction Books 2020  
Hb, 232 pp, £9.99, ISBN 9781789142204

## The Red Planet

**A Natural History of Mars**

Simon Morden

Elliott & Thompson 2021  
Hb, 246 pp, £9.99, ISBN 9781783965618

Here are two books about the planet Mars, both from experienced authors whose writing is noticeably more stylish than normally found in popular science books. But that's where the similarities end. The way the authors approach the subject reflects their writing background, Morden's in science fiction and O'Meara's in amateur astronomy. Personally I'm a fan of both fields – but we're dealing here with a factual topic, and in this context I much prefer O'Meara's approach. But Morden's is an unusual experiment that may appeal to some readers, so I'll start with a few words about that.

Think about the way planets, either real or imaginary, are described in science fiction. We're told what they're like, in evocative language that brings them to life, but we're not told how those things came to be known – the astronomers or robotic probes that made the key discoveries, or the way controversies over competing theories played out. That's fine in fiction, because the planet is simply a setting for the action, and readers would be bored by such details. In non-fiction, however, these details are the action, and omitting them is like throwing the baby out with the bathwater. Yet that's what Morden does, vividly recounting the multi-billion-year history of Mars with plentiful use of the pronouns “I” and “you”, but scarcely a mention of the researchers and space missions that furnished this description.

I suspect many astronomy books are bought purely for their spectacular illustrations, but that won't apply to Morden's as it doesn't contain a single picture. In contrast, O'Meara's offering is much more traditional, with images on almost every page. It's more traditional in approach,

too, recounting the story of Mars in chronological order – not of Martian history, as in Morden's case, but of our understanding of the Red Planet. We start with mythological narratives dating from pre-telescopic times, when Mars was simply a peculiar star that exhibited alarming changes in brightness and position. Then with the advent of the telescope came the realisation that Mars was a world not unlike the Earth – a discovery with mystical as well as scientific repercussions, such as the Martian writing that Swiss medium Hélène Smith produced while in a trance.

The last 60 years have seen numerous spacecraft visit Mars, gradually revealing the picture that Morden described in his book. O'Meara devotes his middle three chapters to this, showing how the scientific emphasis has shifted from the expectation, in the 1960s and 70s, that we would find primitive life on Mars, to the present hope that we may find evidence life existed there in the distant past. To round off the book, he discusses the prospects for future human missions and the practicalities of observing Mars.

All in all, I can thoroughly recommend O'Meara's *Mars* to anyone with an interest in the Red Planet. As for Morden's *The Red Planet*, it's certainly an engaging and well-researched book, but its strange, quasi-fictional style is going to limit the number of people who will enjoy it.

Andrew May  
O'Meara, *Mars* ★★★★★  
Morden, *The Red Planet* ★★



## The Experimental Fire

**Inventing English Alchemy 1300-1700**

Jennifer M Rampling

University of Chicago Press 2020  
Hb, 416pp, £28, ISBN 9780226170709

Alchemy was a tricky business in England between the 14th and 18th centuries. By law, all gold created by alchemy belonged to the crown. Monarchs, chronically short of cash, were keen to engage alchemists to fill their coffers with gold, but were wary of fraud. Alchemists were keen to prove their credentials, but



claiming to have made gold was admitting a crime.

There were other challenges too. Any would-be alchemist had to be seen to adhere strictly to the methods of revered forebears; but the ancient (or more often pseudo-ancient) writings were deliberately obscure to the point of unintelligibility. Alchemy aspired to be a branch of philosophy rather than a craft, but practising anything that smacked of mystical forces risked persecution for necromancy.

*The Experimental Fire* traces the delicate dances between these various hazards and the emergence of an emphatically English version of alchemy, on the way introducing luminaries like George Ripley, John Dee and Edward Kelley, as well as more shadowy figures known only from a single reference.

Alchemy progressed along two intertwined tracks: one of practical experimentation, and one of interpretation or exegesis of classic texts to decipher the processes and the identity of materials hidden behind code names like “the green lion”. Even when a text says “mercury” it may not mean ordinary quicksilver but some other material like philosophical mercury (identity unclear) or even vinegar, making recipes challenging to replicate.

Rambling identifies the dissolution of the monasteries as a critical point in English alchemy. Up to then, many practitioners were monks or friars, and monastic libraries were important for storing and copying alchemical works. With the dissolution the books were scattered to a wide audience, and alchemy became more of a free-for-all.

Edward Kelley (otherwise known as John Dee’s assistant) stands out as one of the boldest figures in the field. When imprisoned, he aimed to buy his way out by proving his skill at making gold. He went so far as to fake ancient texts by combining genuine works with alchemical recipes of his own for experiments he had already mastered. This allowed him to “prove” he had mastered the techniques of the ancients, while also giving a solid pedigree to his own theories. Many of the alchemists appear to have been true believers who spent decades

in experiment. Kelley, convicted of fraud for a pyramid scheme getting patrons to invest in his alchemy, does not seem to have been one.

This is a densely argued academic work which builds its case for a particular view of English alchemy example by example, with a crop of detailed footnotes sprouting from the base of every page. The general reader may find it heavy going. As a reference though, and an introduction to the evolution of English alchemy, it is impeccable.

David Hambling

★★★★★

## With Stake and Spade

**Vampiric Diversity in Poland**

Lukasz Kozak, tr Mark Bence

Adam Mickiewicz Institute, Warsaw 2020

Hb, 180pp, £28, ISBN 9878395689543

This book does a great deal to remind us that the English-speaking world can get stuck in its language-ghetto, using sources that were translated over two centuries ago. We forget that vampires are indigenous to many places other than Serbia. Poland is prominent among them.

The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth encompassed parts of present-day Poland, Ukraine, Belarus and Lithuania. This is a collection of original material from the 16th to the 20th centuries, undistorted by subsequent “academic debates and literary metamorphoses”.

It starts with an introduction to the linguistic variations for what is essentially the same folkloric creature, using local terms like *upiór*, *stryga*, *wieszcz* and others.

It is divided into five sections, arranged chronologically, the first with sources dating from before 1800.

The second has material in defence of belief in *upiórs*. Jesuits wrestling with the new-fangled Cartesianism and atheism, believers in witchcraft and demonologists: they all had a common need to interpret the phenomenon in light of their own disciplines.

The next section has contributions from “Enlightened *Upiór* Hunters”. They are informed about the belief, but reject the

peasant-class explanation. Many commentators notice the link between plague and *upiórism*. One writer noted drily that Satan harasses the simple folk “when returning from taverns”.

Section four has contemporary ethnographic works. Here we can be grateful to the people who gathered information, in a passably modern way, without too much judgment. The same themes of suicide, plague, and witchcraft appear repeatedly, as do the diagnostic criteria for *upiórism*, and the measures taken to prevent it.

The final section has press reports after 1800 and, like so many traditional beliefs, we find that this one is acted upon well into the 20th century.

It seems *upiór*-belief was strongly demarcated by social class. Why didn’t Satan torment town-dwellers and educated people, the way he did peasants? And “less enlightened clergymen also had a part to play”; they may have been believers, or else powerless to stop their panicked congregations.

*With Stake and Spade* has very high production values: the paper is heavy and the binding is good. If you like vampires, you really have no choice. Just buy it.

Deborah Hyde

★★★★★

## Esoteric Mysteries of the Underworld

**The Power & Meaning of Subterranean Sacred Spaces**

Jean-Pierre Bayard, tr Jon E Graham

Inner Traditions 2020

Pb, 310pp, £18.99, ISBN 9781644110621

Jean-Pierre Bayard is the author of numerous monographs on esoteric history, masonry and Rosicrucianism; his *Esoteric Mysteries of the Underworld*, originally published in 1961, appears in its first English translation complete with the previously unpublished text *The Cavern*, extracts from Antoine-Joseph Pernety’s *Mytho-Hermetic Dictionary* of 1758 and his thoughts on Hollow Earth mysticism.

Owing a significant intellectual debt to the French metaphysician René Guénon (1886-1951) and the philosopher Gaston Bachelard (1884-1962), Bayard’s survey of the spiritual and cultural significance of caverns and

grottos is a thoroughly curious discourse on initiation and the human potential to transcend materiality.

Alongside an archaeological overview of the cave as a geological phenomenon, a point of entry to the underworld, Bayard’s primary concern is with its physical and mythological presence as a doorway to the elemental world of hidden and transformative telluric energies. His scholarly appraisal of natural objects such as the cavern, the tree, the river and the stone as metaphorical tropes within Judaeo-Christian, Hellenic, Celtic and Oriental philosophies, among others, comes along with his detailed observations on such structures as the Tomb of the Christian Women in Algeria.

Likewise, his appraisal of the cult of the Black Madonna throughout Europe and his account of the significance of the image and its cavernous domicile to such ethnic groups as the Zingari – who gather at Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer in the Camargue each year to transport the image to the sea – is truly fascinating. Bayard’s ability to integrate complex fields of literary, historical and anthropological knowledge into his own textual descent into the “occult anatomy of the Earth” suggests that the work itself is integral to his own spiritual journey. Along the way we discover more familiar territory such as alchemy, burial rituals, early writing, pictographs and cave art, which populate a very personal alternative history and imply unique spiritual opportunities to the initiate.

For the general reader such a nebulous work may prove to be off-putting and the approach of Bayard somewhat obscure and elitist; but that said, it does contain much of interest and is a fine example of scholarship as a mechanism for personal spiritual growth. The inclusion of previously unpublished material, *The Cavern*, which offers a less detailed and fanciful précis version of the main text, suggests that this volume caters for a focused readership interested in the lesser travelled byways of cultural and esoteric history.

Chris Hill

★★★★★





# A liminal archipelago

An authoritative thematic study of a supremely forteen novelist is let down by its structure, finds **Jay Vickers**

## The Unstable Realities of Christopher Priest

Paul Kincaid

Glyph Limited 2020

Pb, 235pp, £18.99, ISBN 9781780240886

Christopher Priest is arguably the most forteen science fiction writer of all – though as this study of his work makes clear, he stopped identifying himself as an SF writer decades ago. Some critics have labelled his work slipstream or even magical realism – or, as SF critic and longtime fan Paul Kincaid says, it's in “a liminal territory... genre that doesn't really obey the rules of genre”. Priest's novels are all about uncertainty. “This unreliability of reality is one of the defining characteristics of Priest's work”; he doesn't ever use the word, but this is absolutely forteen territory.

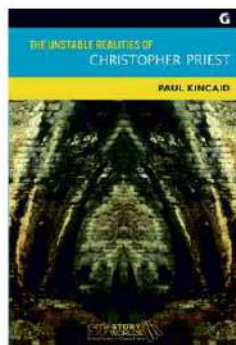
For non-SF fans Priest is probably best known for writing *The Prestige*, which the film of the same name is based on – but his 50-year writing career is so much more than that. *The Unstable Realities of Christopher Priest* explores recurrent themes in his work. Priest has written very little that could be called “hard SF”; the term “inner space” could have been coined for his work. From the first page we see that “what happens in our own minds [is] more important than what happens in the distant reaches of space”.

Priest is intrigued by memory and its unreliability. Our continuing identity is dependent on our memory: I remember what I did last week, last year, so I'm the same person who had those experiences. But if we remember a different version of reality from what other people remember, which version of reality – and which of us – is real?

As his writing career develops, this “sense that reality lies in the eye of the beholder, and is therefore subject to constant

change, would become an ever more overt, ever more complex part, of Priest's fictional world.” The ambiguity of perception occurs in many of his novels, perhaps most clearly in *The Glamour* (1984), where characters using the glamour become not so much invisible as unseen, un-noticed.

In his 1981 novel *The Affirmation*, Peter Sinclair is writing his autobiography, though it's not set in Britain but in the Dream Archipelago. But in the Dream Archipelago another Peter Sinclair writes an account of his life, set “in an imaginary realm called Britain”. Each Sinclair writes the other's story. Both are real. This “doubling” is another recurrent trope in Priest's fiction, taking many forms: “twins, two people who look alike or have the same name, a reflection, a shadow, an echo”.



*The Islanders* (2011) is the most outstanding example of different versions of reality, different histories of people and places. It's presented as a gazetteer of the islands in the Dream Archipelago, the constantly shifting setting of several of Priest's novels. It contains “legal documents, newspaper reports, letters or fragments of autobiography”, as well as longer stories – but they repeatedly contradict each other: “There is no certainty, no consistency, in the realities that are presented by the various entries in the book.”

As the author says, the Dream Archipelago is “an infinitely variable stage set”.

Kincaid demonstrates clearly that there are multiple ways of interpreting Christopher Priest's work: “All are valid, none are complete.” His analysis is excellent, though frequently repetitious as he covers similar or overlapping themes in the various novels. This is largely the consequence of his strange decision to examine Priest's work chronologically in the even-numbered chapters, and thematically in the odd-numbered chapters.

There's also the problem that the author knows his subject so well. He is intimately familiar with every character, every plot line, every recurring theme of every version of every novel – and of every short story.

But because he knows the books so well, he forgets that most readers won't share this encyclopaedic knowledge; even lovers of Priest's work will have read many of them years if not decades ago – and memory, as we are constantly reminded, is unreliable. It would have helped to have had clear, concise plot summaries of each novel as they appear chronologically – and here again the alternate chapters format really doesn't help, because the author is often discussing complex ambiguities in a novel several chapters before introducing the novel itself.

Indeed, at times it becomes confusing as to which novel he's actually discussing; a very simple aid to help the reader and clarify the author's argument, as in many scholarly works, would have been sub-heads.

But perhaps this confusion, this ambiguity, is deliberate; after all, it echoes the essence of Priest's novels, “that remembering and misremembering create the reality we occupy”. Whatever its awkwardness in construction, this book will probably remain the authoritative study of this significant British writer's work.

★★★★★

## Soft Need 23

Udo Breger, Luzius Martin eds

Expanded Media Editions 2020; jim@salesbooks.co.uk

Pb, 258pp, £69, ISBN 9783880300538

Like a giant fanzine, this extraordinary compendium is devoted to William Burroughs and his closest circle, Brion Gysin and Ian Sommerville (his British partner who invented the Dream Machine, a simple strobe flickering at alpha wave frequency).

*Soft Need* is an irregular journal, and this one is not numbered 23 because there was ever a number 22, but because of Burroughs's obsession with coincidences around the number 23 itself.

It is coincidentally fitting that its availability has been delayed until now by a virus – another Burroughs obsession.

There are about 100 items from almost as many people, including varied artwork, and what makes it impressive is the high quality of the central contributors such as Barry Miles, Alan Ginsberg, James Grauerholz and many others in the Burroughs world, and the inclusion of primary material with photographs, letters and striking reminiscences.

Editor Udo Breger vividly recalls visiting Burroughs and Gysin in the apartment building where they both lived, near London's Jermyn Street, with a life-sized cardboard nude of Mick Jagger in the corner of Gysin's room under a pink lamp, and later going with Sommerville to see the Dream Machine in his flat in Kensington.

Among a myriad odds and ends there is a 1960 mescaline invoice to Burroughs, living in Earl's Court, from a mundane-looking firm in Slough; a letter from John Michell (who Ian Sommerville was lodging with in Bath) to say that Ian had just been killed in a car crash; and rare photos including atmospheric shots of Burroughs in the Beat Hotel.

The number of key players involved makes it feel clubby, but in a good way, like a gathering of the Burroughs tribe. Clearly done with a lot of love and respect, it is dedicated to the memory of Sommerville.

Rob James

★★★★★



## ALSO RECEIVED

WE LEAF THROUGH A SMALL SELECTION OF THE DOZENS OF BOOKS THAT HAVE ARRIVED AT FORTANE TOWERS IN RECENT MONTHS...

### Shuker Nature, Vols 1 & 2

Karl PN Shuker

Coachwhip Publications, 2019

Pb, 400+pp each, £16. ISBN 9781616464677 & 9781616464683

By all accounts (even his own) Dr Shuker is a prolific writer, so anyone interested in his crypto-zoological articles (more than 600 at last count) might not be able to keep up with the sheer variety of his publishing venues. Here is the remedy; a two volume compilation of self-selected "significant" material from a decade of publishing his ShukerNature blog on the Internet. The range of topics is astonishingly wide and lavishly illustrated, covering recent discoveries, legendary beasts and amusing inventions from the scientific archives and journals of explorers to modern surveys and commercial exploitation. They include Polynesian cats, whip scorpions, giant insects, mysterious hominids, duck beavers, locust dragons, varicoloured tigers, striped seals, sea-monkeys, the Blue Devil, mermen, flying elephants, beached carcasses, furry worms, water-horses, chupacabras and too many more than we have space to mention. All articles are impressively researched and clearly written, making the underlying science accessible to anyone. Clearly, this set (with its promise of further volumes) should be in school libraries. It would certainly make a superb gift for any young and inquiring mind whether interested in animal mysteries or not; a pity, then, that they are not indexed.

### Homecoming Crossing the Bridge to the Soul

Keith Anthony Blanchard

John Hunt Publishing, 2020

Pb, 221pp, £11.99. ISBN 9781789044119

It is very difficult to know what to make of this slender book. Blanchard declares himself to be a "reincarnated avatar" but goes on to say we all are. In a very affable style, he describes how he turned his unhappy life around, to enter a New Agey spiritual path that borrows from many religions old and new. In

1995, he says, "celestial beings began to appear to me", leading to both contentment and to a broadcasting mission on US radio. He records here his conversations (question and answer sessions) with 'God' about the nature of being and so on. They might have been 'imagined' conversations for all we know; Blanchard offers no context, qualifications, or corroborations. In a universe of possibilities, it might even be true! But Peter O'Toole had it more amusingly in *The Ruling Class* (1972): "When did I realise I was God? Well, I was praying and I suddenly realised I was talking to myself."

### Invoke the Goddess Connecting to the Hindu, Greek, and Egyptian Deities

Kala Trobe

Uweelwyn, 2020

Hb, 205pp, £14.99. ISBN 9780738759623

In many ways this book is the opposite of Blanchard's (above), as Trobe explains the symbolism associated with the major Hindu, Greek and Egyptian goddesses. Trobe writes knowledgeably, leaving the academic underpinning to her spare bibliography. This is a pleasant read even if you do not take it further. Her purpose, though, is to show how you can adapt them through meditation, visualisation and other daily rituals to the benefit of your own life.

### Sacred Geometry Language of the Angels

Richard Heath

Bear/Inner Traditions, 2021

Hb, 278pp, £18.99. ISBN 9781644111185

Heath's study of 'megalithic science' – lavishly illustrated in colour with diagrams and photographs – is a proof of the pioneering work of the late John Michell, taking the thesis to a greater level of detail. Michell had formulated his own ideas of 'sacred geometry' through his study of the prehistoric monuments of Britain, and the work of earlier surveyors – especially their theories of how the units of measurement that they employed – such as the 'mega-

litic yard' and those derived from solar and lunar cycles – were derived. Careful measurements of ancient megalithic sites across western Europe had revealed significant consistencies in those units relating to applied geometry and astronomy. Richard Heath finds the same consistency of harmony and proportion embedded in the architecture of Europe's ancient religious and sacred monuments. Referencing sacred literature and systems of institutionalised numerology, Heath calls their basic principles an 'angelic science', suggesting that it was 'revealed' to the early builders, mathematicians, geometers and philosophers by (as legends tell it) otherworldly entities. Heath, commendably, confines himself to terrestrial and demonstrable examples including Islam's Kaaba and the Dome of the Rock, Mexican and Egyptian pyramids, the Hagia Sophia, the Parthenon, the megalithic avenues at Carnac, and a Buddhist stupa, and the landscape in which the sacred sites were carefully located and developed. Heath – and those to whom this enticing book will most appeal – sees in this ancient unification of metrology, geometry and numerology nothing less than the spiritual origins of civilisation itself.

### Pioneers of Oneness The science and spirituality of UFOs and the Space Brothers

Gerrard Aartsen

BGA Publications, 2020

Hb, 278pp, £17.99. ISBN 9789083036000

The author of this overview of "alien visitation" asks: "Are they here among us?" He lays waste to 'nuts-and-bolts' ufology, supplanting it with "an abundance of evidence" that the 'truth' goes "beyond" that simple question. Before you is a "synthesis of mainstream and post-materialist science with the ageless wisdom of the Space Brothers" that the self-important blurb calls "riveting". Aartsen is an unapologetic apostle of both Adamski's alien Theosophy and the alien salvation of the late Benjamin Creme. Interesting but unconvincing.

### Zhiguai Chinese True Tales of the Paranormal and Glitches in the Matrix

Yi Izzy Yu & John Yu Branscum

Empress Wu Books, 2021

Pb, 111pp, £9.99. ISBN 9781953124067

The editors confess that their experience of translating *The Shadow Book of Ji Yun* (reviewed FT407:57) proved both fascinating and joyful. Furthermore, it inspired them to curate this anthology of modern narratives of unexpected encounters with the paranormal (or the supernatural, or the completely weird). The eponymous genre of *zhiguai* – allegedly true stories of the surreal intrusion of the Otherworld into daily life – was once highly regarded by Chinese historians and philosophers for what these tales could teach us about the mysteries of reality. In translating these 20 short stories the editors not only establish a link between the tales recorded by Ji Yun in the 18th century and the modern genre of foaf-tales (as told by a "friend of a friend"), but an immediate and "shocking similarity" between the personal experiences of Easterners and Westerners. The slim volume – with its promise of more to come – is a delight to read for any forteen.

### Shuckland Weird tales, ghosts, folklore and legends from East Anglia's Waveney Valley

Charles Christian

Heart of Albion Press, 2021

Pb, 199pp, £12.95. ISBN 9781781905643571

Shuck, of course, refers to East Anglia's legendary giant and ghostly 'black dog'. Christian uses the Shuck myth to link the region's towns, churches, castles and other folkloric places into a fairly vivid portrait of 'Shuckland' and its history full of mythic beasts, ghosts, villains, murder and witchcraft. Well-written and packed with local detail. Included here are associations with 'ley lines' and the tales by MR James. This is the first volume in a projected series of 'Haunted Landscapes' from the Heart of Albion Press.

TO SEND REVIEW COPIES, CONTACT THE EDITOR AT [DRSUTTON@FORTEANTIMES.COM](mailto:DRSUTTON@FORTEANTIMES.COM)

## Spice of life

We've waited over 50 years for Frank Herbert's epic novel to receive the cinematic treatment it deserves – and Denis Villeneuve and his team have delivered the goods



### Dune

Dir Denis Villeneuve, US 2021  
On general release

The anticipation for French Canadian producer-director's Denis Villeneuve's *Dune* has been huge. I am delighted to say the film does not disappoint.

Frank Herbert's widely-acclaimed novel of 1965 is a history of the future of mankind spanning several millennia, set out in six novels (see pp34-41). While ignored by the sentinels of highbrow literature, the series left an important and extensive cultural legacy, influencing countless films, games and stories up to the present. However, expectations for the 1984 film version by Alejandro Jodorowsky and David Lynch were dashed by the chaos of a production in which little of Jodorowsky's promised vision survived.

Richard Rubinstein, who had owned the ultimate rights since 1996, licensed the use of its Lynch assets for use in TV versions of the second and third books – *Frank Herbert's Dune* (2000) and *Frank Herbert's Children of Dune* (2003) – which won favourable reviews and even awards, but are difficult to find and largely forgotten.

Work on the present *Dune* began back in 2016, when Villeneuve publicly stated his

### Villeneuve has stated his admiration for Herbert's novel

admiration for the novel and that it was "a longstanding dream" of his to adapt it. Although some principal photography had taken place in 2016, he had to wait until his existing projects – *Arrival* (2016) and *Blade Runner 2049* (2017) – were completed before immersing himself in the *Dune* universe. In 2018, it became clear that the story needed to be told over two parts. This would allow more time to develop the characters and plot lines in satisfactory ways (thereby avoiding many of the pitfalls that doomed Lynch's production; much the same reason was given for dividing up Stephen King's *It* and Peter Jackson's version of *The Lord of the Rings*).

More importantly for SF fans, Villeneuve declared his appreciation for the spirit of Herbert's original novel with its gigantic and complex story. His *Dune* has indeed surpassed by far its predecessors. This shows in the care taken to introduce the main factions – the warring houses,

the semi-religious orders, and global institutions – only briefly, obviously with the intention of giving them more attention in the sequels. This also simplifies the opening story (especially important for those new to the *Dune* universe) and sharpens its dynamics. The same deft touch elevates most of the things fans hoped to see: the Holzmann energy shields, the dragonfly-like ornithopters, the giant spice harvesters, the cityscape of Arakeen, the 20km-long Spacing Guild "heighliners" and, of course, the planet Arrakis itself with its notorious sandworms.

The production team are to be congratulated for bringing them to life, using all the arts, including high-end CGI graphics, in a way that seems 'natural' to the context of the story. In accordance with Arthur C Clarke's dictum about the technology of the future, this all has the aura of magic about it. It looks amazing, much of it both mysterious and deadly.

The film is not without faults, but they are minor, dwarfed by the grand scale of the story itself, and certainly do not get in the way of our immersion and enjoyment. There are some differences to the Herbert canon, but only fans would notice... or care. The famous "Fear is the mind killer" prayer, and such human oddities as 'Mentats' and 'Navigators' are minimised. So too are the 'spice' visions of our Homeric young hero Paul Atreides (convincingly played by Timothée Chalamet).

Another example – telegraphed in the advance publicity – is that the important character of Keynes, the Imperially-appointed planetologist, is now female (Sharon Duncan-Brewster, familiar from *Dr Who* and *Star Wars*). It makes no difference to the story, but demonstrates Villeneuve's support for female actors. There are a few references to contemporary ecological awareness, but this

seems appropriate as it was the 'dunification' of the Oregon coast that inspired Herbert to write the saga in the first place. And Jessica, Paul's mother (Rebecca Ferguson) is not so much Lynch's "space nun" as a covert warrior with all the powers of the Bene Gesserit; and yet even she trembles in the presence of her order's mysterious Mother Superior.

There are many memorable scenes: the disturbing conversations with Baron Harkonnen (a truly menacing Stellan Skarsgård), Paul's interview with the Bene Gesserit Truthsayer (a sinister Charlotte Rampling), Paul's weapon training with the Atreides Swordmaster (Josh Brolin), Jessica's crucial encounter with the Fremen housekeeper Shadout Mapes, and the tragic heroism of Duncan Idaho (Jason Momoa).

The production team has brought a distinctly modern interpretation to the larger-than-life plot. Even the CGI is carefully used. The cinematography is suitably heroic; alternating near and far shots with a painter's eye for colour, texture, and pattern; moments of Zen-like stillness flashing into action as needed. The score is viscerally uplifting in awe-inspiring moments.

This film takes Paul's story to its halfway point; the promised part two will lay the foundation for Paul's descendants to become rulers of the 'known Universe' inhabited by humans in a variety of evolved forms, terrorised out of their stagnation by the tyranny of an immortal God-Emperor.

I really hope the success of these films will ensure the production of further instalments. We have waited 55 years for the *Dune* saga to be given the filmic interpretation it deserves. Here it is.

Bob Rickard







## TELEVISION

FT's very own couch potato, STU NEVILLE, casts an eye over the small screen's current forteen offerings



### Paranormal Caught On Camera

Blaze

As has been noted before in these pages, one of the inevitable results of so many people carrying phones capable of capturing unconvincing forteen footage is a proliferation of programmes that aggregate such clips and present them with varying degrees of criticality. *Paranormal Caught On Camera* exemplifies this approach, hitting every motif we've come to expect: "From poltergeist activity to lights in the sky, these first-hand accounts just might turn sceptics into believers!"; or, in some cases, the reverse, but this isn't really considered. The individual episodes are resolutely cookie-cutter in format: starting with the now-classic portentous intro: "Does

THIS shocking footage really show A DEMONIC ATTACK?" – just think of the mileage Shatner would get from that line – complete with highlights from the forthcoming episode in the manner of Gerry Anderson productions, albeit less well-acted.

With admirable earnestness, the graphic announces, "Case ID: The Cabin from Hell", and it wastes no time in zooming in, satellite-style, on a beeping dot, as often as not somewhere in the American mid-West, and the voiceover booms back in: "Herberderbertsville,

*The photo shows a blurry grey thing sticking out of blurry blue water*

Ohio" followed by a potted history of the location, and the tale of how the poor, hardworking labourer and his family of 11 inadvertently built a log-cabin in the midst – inevitably – of a sacred First Nation graveyard. All manner of unsettling occurrences later, they fled, as has everyone else who has tried to make a home in it. The real mystery here, of course, is why anyone wants to live in a haunted shed in the middle of nowhere; but sadly the programme has no time for such philosophical debates, concentrating instead on the low-light antics of people in baseball caps shrieking and the kind of footage *Most Haunted* fans know and love. Meters ping, people get mysterious scratches, things fall over. Being Stateside, there's lots of talk of demons, as opposed to common or garden ghosts, and soon enough *PCOC*'s regular experts appear to give their verdict: "If this is real, then it could be a ghost" – well, gee, thanks.

A bit of calm, and crediting the audience with critical

thought and an attention span, would work wonders, but there's weirdness to cram in. Later in the same episode we're treated to footage of an alleged Almasty chasing a carful of Russian teens – cue a Lada full of adolescent shrieks as the creature moves in, rather endearingly, with the same gait as the eponymous *Robot Monster* from the 1953 B-movie (sadly sans diving helmet). Then we get sky-trumpets; a clip of a misty figure apparently opening a suburban front door and, on a similar theme, an old FT favourite, the fire-door-opening (and closing) ghost of Hampton Court. "Is this a victim of Henry VIII's wrath?" Well, given that its costume looks to date from at least 100 years later, it appears to be wearing a Skeleto mask and it can open and close fire doors that didn't exist in the 16th century, I'd hazard not; but this doesn't put the experts off either.

As a time-passer it's good enough, but this can be done far better, and in next issue's review I'll look at an example that shows how.

## Between Waves

Dir Virginia Abramovich, Canada 2021  
On digital platforms

This is a heartfelt sci-fi romance mystery that bites off more than it can chew. The central character is Jamie (Fiona Graham), a rather dislikeable photographer weighed down by more issues than you can shake a stick at: she has been traumatised since childhood by witnessing her mother's suicide in the bath; her science-whiz boyfriend Isaac (Luke Robinson) has disappeared, feared drowned, and the detective in charge isn't being terribly helpful; and Jamie is pregnant, wrestling with the decision of whether or not to have an abortion.

Already there is too much going on. Films have been made that deal with just one of these issues; high concept this is not.

We haven't even got to the body of the plot yet – and here things become even more complicated. We learn that Isaac was working in the field of sub-atomic physics, exploring the possibility that atoms can exist in more than one place at the same time: in effect, in multiple parallel universes. Isaac had posited the notion not only that humans can do this too, but also that every time a person makes a decision, a parallel universe comes into existence: an endless series of 'sliding doors' moments. Jamie starts to imagine that she catches glimpses of Isaac around town, and as a consequence comes to believe there might be some truth in his research. In an effort to solve the mystery, she follows clues Isaac has left her and travels to the Azores for a final reckoning.

I think I've got that right – but the science is vague, as you might expect. You might also

expect the film's aesthetic to reflect its concerns, and the obvious recurring motif is water. Not only does water feature heavily in the imagery (rain, lakes, baths, bottled water, the ocean) but it also informs the film's muted look, which eschews bright colours and has many scenes shot with a pale blue filter: appropriately downbeat, but it renders the film somewhat uninteresting visually.

But the biggest problem is that there is simply too much crammed into the running time. On top of everything already mentioned, there are suggestions of shadowy corporations trying to get their hands on Isaac's research; there's Jamie's studio assistant Marc, who harbours an unrequited love for his boss; and there's the suspicion that Jamie may have been more involved in Isaac's disappearance than we'd suspected. Perhaps the most

egregious example of this piling up of contrivances is Miguel, a bar owner whom Jamie meets in the Azores: he's a gentle but melancholy soul who is himself grieving over the loss of his daughter who, you guessed it, drowned in the sea.

By the time the big finish arrived, I was hopelessly lost in the multiple parallel universes, didn't know which version of which character I was watching or frankly what was going on – a state of affairs brought about by over-complication, obfuscation, and lack of clarity. *Between Waves* isn't a bad film – even if the script is a mess, the acting is committed and Fiona Graham in particular lets it all hang out as the increasingly frantic Jamie – but it fails to deliver on any of its many themes.

Daniel King





**Read books, change lives.**

The Feel Good Book Club is a book subscription box with a difference. Every time you receive your book box, you're helping others as 100% of our proceeds go to Samaritans.

Read. Give. Smile.

Join us today:  
[thefeelgoodbookclub.com](http://thefeelgoodbookclub.com)  
 Proudly supporting Samaritans, a registered charity

the **FEELGOOD** book club

**Sheffield Hallam University**

## ARE YOU A BELIEVER?

We are looking for believers in the paranormal to take part in an exciting new research project led by researchers at Sheffield Hallam University.

This project seeks to explore the nature of your beliefs and the impact of these beliefs in your daily life.

If you are 18+ and believe in any aspect of the anomalous, we want to hear from you!

For more information or to set up a confidential, anonymous interview, please get in touch at:  
[paranormalbelief@shu.ac.uk](mailto:paranormalbelief@shu.ac.uk)

## FROM HAMBURG TO LONDON

*A History of the Sieveking Family*

by Paul Sieveking

Hardback, 200pp, with 133 illustrations (22 in colour)



Covers 500 years and 15 generations, encompassing the Thirty Years War; the excitement of the French Revolution; the horrors of the Napoleonic occupation of Hamburg; the cholera epidemic of 1831 that launched Amalie Sieveking, nursing pioneer; the world financial crash of 1857; Dr Edward Sieveking caught between Princess Alexandra and Queen Victoria (the mother-in-law from Hell); Lance Sieveking directing the first running commentaries and the first TV play; the RAF's Operation Gomorrah, 1943; Gale Sieveking and advances in prehistoric archaeology.

Further details from Paul Sieveking at [sieveking@forteanimes.com](mailto:sieveking@forteanimes.com) or write to him at 38 Allcroft Rd, London NW5 4NE



# **BORIS BOG BRUSHES**

**COMEDIC PRESENTS WITH HEAD  
AND BODY BORIS. HAVE PLEASURE  
IN MAKING HIM DO A U-TURN BY  
SHOWING HIM DOWN THE BEND**

**ALSO BORIS BOG PAPER  
AVAILABLE AT:**

**[WWW.BOGSTANDARDSHOP.COM](http://WWW.BOGSTANDARDSHOP.COM)**



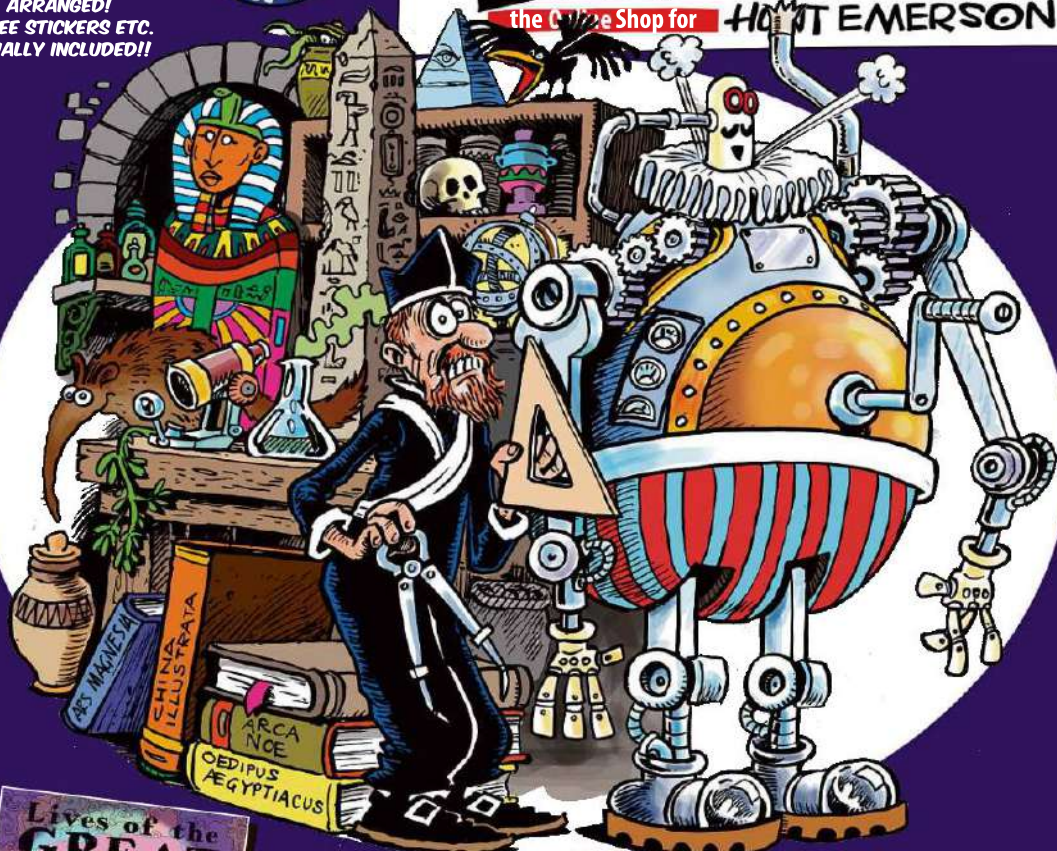


- \*BOOKS, ARTWORK AND OTHER STUFF!
- \*ALL BOOKS ARE SIGNED!
- \*MANY HAVE SKETCHES!
- \*PERSONAL DEDICATIONS ARRANGED!
- \*FREE STICKERS ETC. USUALLY INCLUDED!!



# LARGECOW

the Online Shop for **HOT EMERSON**



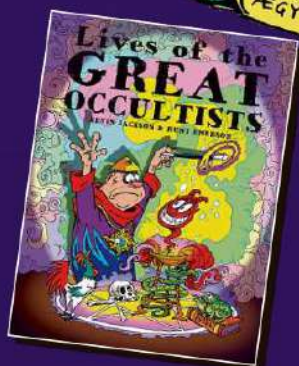
## ATHANASIUS KIRCHER - The Great Occultist's Great Occultist!

This 17th Century Jesuit was celebrated as the greatest polymath of his time. He knew everything! He was a pioneer of microscopy and germs, he traveled through outer space, he invented robots, magnetic clocks, a giant megaphone, and an early version of television - and you should see his **Katzenklavier** - the cat-powered musical instrument!

You can read his story, along with over 40 other Magi, Madmen, Mystics and Charlatans, in

### LIVES OF THE GREAT OCCULTISTS

120 pages in colour, £12.99



My other books include:

#### THE RIME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER

The great narrative ballad by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, rendered as a comic book full of awful puns. **£11.99**

#### DANTE'S INFERNO

The noble and mysterious 14th Century poem by Dante Alighieri made hilarious by Emerson and Jackson. **£11.99**

#### BLOKE'S PROGRESS

Based on the ideas of John Ruskin. Part satire, part economic and philosophical treatise, part love story, part political argument, part psychedelic craziness, and always funny. **£12.99**

#### CALCULUS CAT/ HOT JAZZ SPECIAL DEAL!!

A special deal on two books. **CALCULUS CAT** (usually £10) and **HOT JAZZ** (usually £12) for just **£17!!**

...and more!

[WWW.LARGECOW.COM](http://WWW.LARGECOW.COM)

BOOKS. ORIGINAL ARTWORK. CARTOONS. COMICS PAGES. PRINTS. FREE GIFTS.

# LETTERS

CONTACT US BY POST: PO BOX 1200, WHITSTABLE CT1 9RH, OR E-MAIL [SIEVEKING@FORTEANTIMES.COM](mailto:sieveking@forteantimes.com)  
PLEASE PROVIDE US WITH YOUR POSTAL ADDRESS



## Polite debate

Nigel Watson reported on the suggestion that the ancient aliens thesis was inherently racist because it refused to acknowledge the ability of people of colour to construct impressive edifices [FT409:32]. Now, while I don't deny that some aficionados of ancient aliens may be bigots, for me, as someone who has followed the genre ever since von Däniken's *Chariots of the Gods* was serialised in a Sunday newspaper back in the 1960s (as 'Was God a Spaceman?'), I never got a sense that racism was a significant factor. Rather, it seemed to be driven by a desire to embarrass plodding, conventional historians by showing them how 'outside the box' thinking could revolutionise their areas of expertise. And there was also the seductive mixture of ancient history and aliens. Furthermore, Stonehenge and Carnac also got the ancient aliens treatment and, as far as I'm aware, no one ever maintained they were constructed by people of colour.

• I was struck by the similarities between James Randi and Richard Dawkins that emerged in the readers' letters about the former [FT409:73] and the obituary of Reverend John Polkinghorne [FT409:30] regarding the latter. Both Dawkins and Randi came across as extremely rigid in their views, closed-minded and uncompromising – ironically, the very qualities often attributed to religious fanatics. Perhaps it doesn't really matter if you are a sceptic or a believer just as long as you are prepared to engage in polite and meaningful discussion.


**Geoff Clifton**

*Solihull, West Midlands*

## Astrological amulet?

Under the title "Mediæval satire?" you describe and show a silver-gilt object as "depicting a knight emerging from a snail shell on the back of a goat" [FT406:12]. I'm no expert on molluscs or cephalopods, but the "snail" looks like a nautilus to me. Unlike their extinct relatives, the ammonites, nautilus are still found swimming in modern seas, and fossils of both are found in huge numbers. They

## SIMULACRA CORNER



Elle Salsbury took this selfie up the Long Mynd in Shropshire in December 2020, but didn't notice John Lennon's face in the snow behind her until a friend pointed it out.

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures. Send them (with your postal address) to Fortean Times, PO Box 1200, Whitstable CT1 9RH or to [sieveking@forteantimes.com](mailto:sieveking@forteantimes.com).

have made their way into folklore as beheaded snakes or dragons.

Hmmm... a knight and a dragon? I'm reminded of Adrienne Mayor's theory that fossils could have inspired monsters of Greek myth (see the Corinthian vase showing Hercules shooting at the head of a monster, or the feature suggesting protoceratops bones and eggs from the central Asian steppes might have led to tales of griffins – FT146:25, 170:50-55).

I was also intrigued by the idea that snails might symbolise cowardice. This can't be due to their making a hasty getaway; maybe it's their tendency to hide in their little houses, but that would make the third little pig who built his house of bricks craven rather than clever. Given the knight's gesture

of prayer, my guess is that the mediæval token featured in FT is an emblem of George and the dragon (riding home with/on his trophy after successful combat?)

However, it might be part of a set of astrological amulets, showing Draco the dragon, Capricornus the sea-goat, and perhaps Perseus portrayed as a knight. So the dragon here might be the sea monster. If a maiden chained to a cliff and a winged horse turn up, that would clinch it. Other theories are available at all leading retailers.

**Owen Whiteoak**

*London*

## Ghosts & Gypsies

Yet again I am struck by how two erudite FT contributors such as

Jeremy Harte and Dean Teasdale [FT409:72-73] can be dragged down a rabbit hole about existence and interpretation of ghosts within certain cultures. As a part Irish Gypsy and an academic folklorist at University College Dublin, I find it easy to see how these non-arguments exist. The folkloristic definition of a myth is a story told not to be believed. A legend has a definite time, date and location – and crucially has a name attached. A transitional (urban) legend can intermingle 'it is said' etc, the vanishing hitchhiker being the most obvious. Belief in ghosts is more virulent in certain cultures than others. But a quick glance at the Aarne-Thompson-Uther Index (ATU Index) sheds light on the difference between folk belief and where ghosts (if they exist) and apparitions occur. Folkloristics is as forensic as pathology – but the corpse might rise again!

**Dave McHugh**

*Dublin, Ireland*

## Deaf to argument

John Roberts's letter describing his encounter with "Showman Randi" [FT409:76], brought to mind what CS Lewis said in the introduction to his book *Miracles*. What matters in any investigation is the underlying philosophy that a person brings to their experiences. Lewis said that the only person he knew who claimed to have seen a ghost was an unbeliever who didn't believe the evidence of her own senses. She decided that she must have been hallucinating.

No amount of evidence was ever going to convince someone like Randi, who long ago made up his mind about the paranormal. If 'miracles' don't exist, then you can't have witnessed one. End of debate. There will always be a logical explanation for those who want to find it: hallucinations produced by infrasound, psychological self-deception or whatever. They may claim to be scientific in their approach, but it is a very close-minded type of science, admitting no speck of doubt into their purely materialistic cosmos.

**Mike Sherlock**

*By email*



# LETTERS

## Phantom donkeys

Regarding the gypsy story of one of the Smith family stopping in a “field in Suffolk” and encountering a donkey that turned out not to be their donkey after all, but a mysterious kind of donkey that, while standing stock still, always seem to “recede” when its owner approached it, before vanishing [FT407:34]: I have heard one story of a “phantom donkey” from Suffolk, while in numerous traditions about Black Shuck (not just from Suffolk), Shuck is a donkey.

In *Westleton – Customs and Sayings recorded by the Women's Institute in 1922* (Westleton Women's Institute, Leiston Press, Leiston 2008), the local WT's folklorists recorded that an invisible donkey was heard frequently by Mr J Spall of the Suffolk village of Westleton, who lived with his wife in a cottage near the churchyard. He would hear at midnight a noise coming from the yard outside his house, a sound “as if a donkey with a clanking chain” were moving about.

The Shuck in the Suffolk village of Melton (near Sutton Hoo) had a donkey's head and a smooth, velvety coat. Near the Horse and Groom pub in Melton, one Gordon Kemp tried to catch

it (or, in one version, shoot it, with a gun borrowed from the pub), but it bit his hand and vanished. This was sometime in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, according to *Country Folklore: Suffolk* (1893).

Another Suffolk Shuck variation was Old Shock, recorded in around 1830, which could transform itself from the usual black dog into a donkey. In other accounts it is a dog “as large as a donkey”, which could be where the donkey idea originally came from.

From Yorkshire and Lincolnshire comes the Gytrash or Shagfoal, a shapeshifting version of Shuck that can appear as a crane or a horse, mule or donkey with burning eyes.

From Bristol comes a report from 1908 of a large black dog that appeared in a dead-end lane in Hallen, near where the M49 bridge now is. It was seen climbing out from a hedge before transforming into a donkey and standing on its hind legs. (*Paranormal Database* [www.paranormaldatabase.com/reports/shuckdata.php?pageNum\\_parameters=2](http://www.paranormaldatabase.com/reports/shuckdata.php?pageNum_parameters=2))

Returning to Suffolk, I have also come across an account of the recurring phenomenon from gypsy ghost stories – an animal

that appeared normal except that the horses were terrified by it, warning the humans that something was wrong.

This tale was gathered by the same volunteer WI folklorists of Westleton in 1922 who wrote down the one about the phantom donkey. It featured the same J Spall who was haunted by a phantom donkey. He was travelling back to Westleton by road at night, driving a cart full of “whins” – harvested gorse, used as fuel, particularly in bread ovens.

On the road, Spall encountered a white horse, a “loose horse” who fell into step with the three horses pulling his cart. His own horses were frightened, they were “a muck of sweat” and almost bolted; they only calmed down when Mr Spall managed to shoo the “loose horse” away with his stick. When he stopped at The Plough pub in Wangford, he found his horses were cold to the touch. He never worked out whether he'd seen a ghost or not. I've also found another account of the phenomenon of a creature “receding” when witnesses approached. A poster to the Centre for Fortean Zoology blog, giving his name as “Woody”, described a 1990s encounter with a classic

black shuck hellhound while out walking his own dog at Martlesham Creek in Suffolk. Whenever Woody approached the creature, it always seemed to be the same distance away.

**Matt Salusbury**  
*Dunwich, Suffolk*

## Nessie hunting

In September 1969 I was part of the Loch Ness Investigation, the last two desperate weeks. I can't find anything on the Internet that relates to that period. I have lots of photos from that time and would like to post them to anyone else who was there. Please get in touch via *Fortean Times*.

**Liz Lloyd (previously known as Andy Gosling)**

*By email*

## Burning question

I admit I am no expert on the subject of mediums, but like any true fortan I watch their demonstrations with a dispassionate eye whenever they appear on my screen. However, over the years I have found their performances to be uniformly disappointing – not just because of their egregious use of common cold reading techniques, but because of their failure to address one blindingly obvious and supremely important question.

It seems to me that if they could truly communicate with someone's dead relative, they should not be wasting everybody's time by kind-of describing what the deceased was like and what they enjoyed while they were alive before delivering some bland platitude about how they are at peace now and are sending their love to the sitter in the audience. They should instead be asking the departed spirit the one question that only the dead can answer and which is arguably the most important question for humankind: *Is there a God?*

If the answer to that question is Yes, then the next question is: Which religion is correct? Should I immediately become a Sikh, a Sunni Muslim, a Catholic, a Buddhist, a Shintoist, a Zoroastrian, a Presbyterian even, or should I follow one of the thousands of other

## Marine mirage

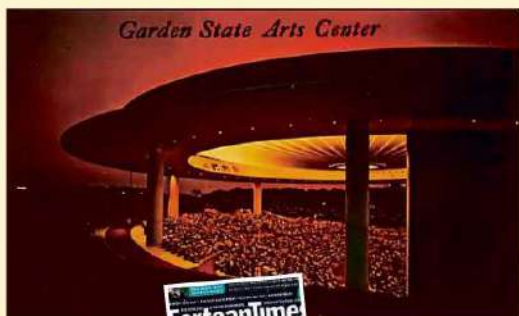
I witnessed this sea mirage (not sure if it's actually a Fata Morgana) on the horizon of Southsea Beach, Hampshire, at about 6pm on 18 July 2021. Some of it was on Hayling Island. In all of my 40 years of living in Portsmouth I have never seen this phenomenon before. Glitch in the Matrix?

**Rob Shaw**  
*Portsmouth*

*NOTE: A Fata Morgana is a complex form of superior mirage visible in a narrow band right above the horizon. The Italian term translates the name of the Arthurian sorceress Morgan le Fay ('Morgan the Fairy'), due to a belief that these mirages, often seen in the Strait of Messina, were fairy castles in the air or false land conjured up by her witchcraft to lure sailors to their deaths.*







## Space Liberace

After the publication of the Space Liberace story [FT408:32-39], I found more evidence of the Liberace space/UFO connection. A programme



from a 1979 Liberace concert at the Garden State Arts Center (now called the PNC "Pittsburgh National Corporation" Bank Arts Center) in Holmdel, New Jersey, shows Liberace under what looks like a futuristic UFO-



shaped building. The title of the programme is "Stairway to the Stars". The other image is from a vintage postcard of the arts centre looking like a UFO landing. Could this be more proof of Liberace's extraterrestrial origins?

**Jeffrey Vallance**  
*Canoga Park, California*

religions in the world? Wouldn't it be absolutely delicious if it turned out that we should all have been following some heretical sect that was stamped out in the Middle Ages? However, I digress.

Some mediums might argue, as they often seem to do, that they can't be as specific as everyone would like because the spirits only communicate to them via vague images and feelings. But if they can tell that uncle John (or is it James?) worked with his hands, enjoyed watching sports, and died from something to do with his chest area, then surely it wouldn't be too much of a stretch for the dearly departed to send them an image of a crucifix, a star of David, or whatever image is appropriate in order to indicate which religion we should all be following. And a simple yes or no is all that is required for the existence of God. Their inability or reluctance to address this most burning of questions confirms their charlatanism in my eyes.

Now, I must admit that I have not done any in-depth research at this point – I whipped up this missive somewhat on the spur

of the moment – so perhaps there are many mediums across the world who have professed that one or other of the gods do exist and that we should all be following this or that religion. In fact, I'd be surprised if some haven't. However, I suspect that if their answers were compared, and a surprisingly large number of gifted individuals really could communicate with the dead, then I would argue that either they would all be staunch atheists or fervently devout followers of the same religion, depending on what the spirits of the dead revealed to them "from the other side". Is there a flaw in my reasoning?

**Scott Wilson**  
*Glasgow*

## More Calverton Ghosts

I would like to thank Aaron Bulley for his letter about ghosts in Calverton, Nottinghamshire [FT406:71] and add a few more local sightings. I grew up in

Calverton in the 1970s and 1980s and went to the local comprehensive school, where Mrs Hoyle, the vicar's wife, taught religious education. If she felt we had made enough progress with five world religions, we would get a lesson in local history, which included several ghosts.

The ghost sighted on George's Hill was also said to haunt Bonner Hill and Spindle Lane, a bridleway connecting the two hills. It was at that time described as a tall man in a tall hat, black cloak and buckled shoes (think Puritan?). Further down George's Lane, a lady was visiting her friend when an ornamental teapot floated down diagonally from a dresser, landing undamaged at the visitor's feet.

The old vicarage on Main Street, known as Calverton Old Hall, was demolished in the early 1960s to make way for the Miners' Welfare, now also demolished and replaced with housing known as Old

Hall Close. Two workmen were being put up at the new vicarage by the Hoyles while demolition work was taking place at the Old Hall. They reported being disconcerted by the sound of the chinking of crockery, as if tea was being served in china cups, and later fled the worksite after hearing heavy footsteps crossing an upstairs room where the floor had already been removed.

Little Tommy, either a dwarf or a small boy, haunted Main Street in front of Burnor Pool, a group of cottages opposite St Wilfrid's Church. Children in the 1950s and 1960s would cross Main Street to avoid the spectre of a little old lady in black who had been seen on Main Street in front of the Old Hall/Miners' Welfare. It was said that if she touched you on the shoulder, you would die. What those children who crossed over to avoid the little old lady didn't know was that there was a murder victim mouldering away in one of the gardens next to the playing field – but that's another story.

The directions in Aaron Bulley's letter are a bit confusing – if you have reached the winding, uphill part of George's Lane you are leaving the village rather than entering it. If anyone would like to visit the locations of these sightings, follow Calverton Road out of Arnold, go over Dorket Head and down George's Hill. A right turn at the bottom of George's Lane takes you down Main Street and Bonner Hill is on the right, a short way past the church.

**Kay Lowe**  
*Arnold, Nottinghamshire*



"Dad, why is it always snowing?"

# It Happened to Me...

## Further strange episodes

My mother's family came from Mullingar in southern Ireland, and in the late 1950s she used to take my sister and me for three to four weeks in the summer. My father would follow on later. My grandparents had a farmhouse just outside the town. One evening when I was aged about six we had gone to visit my aunt who lived a 10-minute walk from my grandparents. I decided to walk back to the farmhouse. I crossed a vast field and reached the driveway to the farmhouse. The driveway was quite long, 80 to 100 feet (24-30m). There was a solid high hedge to my left, and farm buildings to my right. I must have walked half way down when something stepped out from the hedge and stood in front of me. It had a human shape, but I recall large fox-like ears and bright yellow eyes. We seemed to look at each other for ages. Then it moved towards me. I screamed and ran. When I got back to the farmhouse, I was hysterical with fear. Many years later I saw illustrations of an entity called a Pooka in a book on Irish folklore. Some of these resembled the creature I had seen.

- A couple of years later, when I was eight, I had another memorable encounter in Mullingar. It was a beautiful summer's day in 1960 and my two cousins and I were off having adventures. It was midday and we were skirting a vast green field. One of my cousins noticed a circular grid cover. Puzzled why there was a grid in a rather remote field, my cousins decided to lift the lid. There were two metal rings so this was quite easy to do. As soon as the cover was put to one side a large spider came out. Its body was bright red and all its extremities bright yellow. It looked like some bizarre toy. It seemed aggressive and darted back and forth



## *"Suddenly there were three loud knocks on my bedroom window"*

at us with its front legs held high. One of my cousins got a stick and held it towards the creature, which ran at it and appeared to try, and hold the stick with its two front legs. Eventually the spider retreated back underground. We quickly replaced the cover and ran off feeling rather perturbed.

- In the winter of 1961 my grandmother became gravely ill and my mother went over to Ireland to be with her. She had been gone four or five days when I was upstairs in bed (in Flint, North Wales). I turned the light off to go to sleep when suddenly there were three loud knocks on my bedroom window. I lay there terrified for hours. By noon the next day we had a telegram from my mother telling us that grandmother had died. Many years later I read of the Irish spirit called a Banshee, which sometimes announced death by knocking on windows.

- In the summer of 1962, when I was 10, my sister and I had been helping our father in the garden in Flint, North Wales. It was late afternoon and as a reward my father suggested we walk up to Nan's and he would buy us some sweets. Nan was a close family friend who ran the corner shop at the top of the road. She used to own the shop with her sister, but her sister had died the previous year. We got there just after 5pm and the shop was shut. We could hear Nan in the storeroom at the back, so my father suggested we go through the side gate and see if she would sell us some sweets. At the rear of the shop there was a double door to the storeroom, which was wide open.

Although the day was still bright an electric light was on inside. We could hear Nan moving about and occasionally speaking. Then she came into sight briefly as she walked from right to left. She was followed by a dark fluid shape moving slowly. It had substance because I recall that when it moved under the electric light it cast a shadow. Then it was gone. We could hear Nan saying something;

by the inflection in her voice it seemed to be a question. There was a pause then a chillingly strange voice said "No, I'm never cold." The shape came back into view and Nan followed it. The shape became still and Nan walked into it. Nan's image seemed to shimmer for a few seconds, then Nan moved again taking the shape with her. Then we could hear her crying. My father silently indicated we should leave.

When we got home my mother was very upset. A sparrowhawk had become caught in the garden netting that covered the strawberry patch. My father held the terrified bird while my mother cut it free. It circled us for ages, giving out its amazing cry. When I looked, my parents were holding hands.

**Stephen Roberts**  
Levens, Cumbria

## Biro trick

I was slumbering during the last hour or so before getting up when I imagined a snatch of a scene and so took out pen and paper to record it. As I did so, I knocked the cap off the pen.

I searched for it in the folds of the dressing gown I wear in bed in the winter, its pockets, the duvet, the floor, and under the bed (in case it bounced oddly). I actually got up and searched the floor. Giving up, I went to my desk to procure another biro. Imagine my surprise when the biro I removed from its pot had two caps, one on each end. I have no memory of doing this in the past, never mind of doing it now. I went back to my bed and looked again only to find the cap on the dark, obscuring foot of my bedside lamp, which is about 3ft (1.2m) off the ground. While nothing paranormal had taken place, it had a charming sense of the Imp or Hermes-Trickster about it.

**Simon van Someren**  
London



## World on hold

I was a postman working at the main Royal Mail depot in Reading. One day in 1990 or 1991, I was working in the loading bay, sorting mailbags. One trailer was full, so I wheeled it inside to the sorting area. I manoeuvred it into position and chained up the handle. Then something strange happened. It was as if a video player was put on pause. Time froze. All sound stopped and everyone froze in place. They looked like waxwork dummies. I looked around incredulously, and noticed one other person doing the same. Our eyes met, and as soon as they did it was as if someone pressed the 'play' button. A sea of sound resumed and people moved, carrying on as if nothing had happened. The 'pause' probably lasted a few seconds, but seemed longer.

Shocked, I walked back to the loading bay and tried to compose myself. The other person who didn't freeze was a most beautiful girl with long blond hair. I'm ashamed to say I couldn't bring myself to go back inside and speak to her; my heart was pounding and I had butterflies in my stomach. I caught sight of her in the canteen the next day, but didn't get the opportunity to talk to her. To my deepest regret, I never saw her again.

**Eric Fairman**  
*Reading, Berkshire*

## Running through treacle

Around 1975, when I was about eight, I was coming home from school in Blechley, Buckinghamshire, with several friends (with mothers walking behind). We were running ahead trying to be first to the corner of the road as it turned left and went down the hill. I was in the lead and had just entered the bend when all of a sudden it was like running through treacle. My legs were running in slow motion and I couldn't speed up. It was like a beam from above was just on me and it took all my strength to move at all. Indeed, I slowed so much my companions shot past me on the inside. They weren't affected at all. I re-

member feeling paricky. Then just as suddenly, after a few seconds I 'came out the other end', and sped right up again. I had only travelled about 15m (50ft). No one else had noticed anything amiss and must have assumed I was just mucking around. Nothing like it has ever happened again.

**Cathy Peake**  
*London*

## Sizewell Shuck

While looking for glow-worms (a scarce and declining creature) with my sister Vicky Quantrell at Sizewell, Suffolk (pictured below), on 17 July 2021, we were reminded of Black Shuck, the demon ghost dog of East Anglia. Seeing Shuck is traditionally said to foreshadow an impending demise. Walking past Sizewell B nuclear reactor, we were spooked by a black dog the size of a large collie standing behind us. It was similarly surprised, made no sound and ran off towards Minsmere. Nothing too odd, we thought, just a stray dog. However, its appearance was accompanied by two loud whistles from someone nearby. I whistled back to get the dog to return, but it disappeared into bushes. We expected the whistling person to pass by and ask us where their dog had gone; but on checking the beach we were apparently alone. No sign of anyone. Just who were the mysterious, unseen whistler and the silent black dog?

An earlier unexplained

experience I had on a glow-worm survey in Essex in 2014 was reported in your pages [FT323:74].

**Tim Gardiner**  
*By email*

## My late wife calls

Re 'Phone calls from the dead' [FT405:30-35]: about a month ago [in April 2021], my mother heard her old mobile phone ring. The phone, which had not been used for at least four years, was an old cheap pre-Smartphone type, capable of making calls and sending texts and little else. I was in the room with her when it rang. We were both very surprised as the battery in the phone had run out a long time ago. Our surprise turned to shock when we saw the screen light up, showing the call was from my wife – who had died over five years ago. The phone then went totally dead and we could not recharge it. What was equally strange was my mother hardly ever used this phone; it was bought to be kept in her car in case of breakdowns. She told me that my wife had never contacted her on it and she had definitely not given her the number. This strange call unnerved us both very much.

**Hugh Morris**  
*Little Downham, Cambridgeshire*

## Unsettling

A particular stretch of road where I live has often struck me as having an unsettling at-

mosphere. This I feel has been corroborated by two experiences. The first occurred some years ago when I was walking to my local supermarket with my eldest son, a teenager at the time. At the easterly end of the stretch of road in question a car was parked, surrounded by a group of around 10 youths. My son had also seen it and commented: "I don't know why they hang around cars like that." When we both looked again, only a moment later, there was no car and no youths.

The second experience occurred relatively recently. At a certain point, the footpath narrows and is restricted in width by a roadside telecoms cabinet and a stout metal fence opposite, so that it is sometimes necessary to give way to pedestrians approaching from the opposite direction. I had done just that, as what appeared to be a family were approaching, a man, a woman and two identically dressed girls whom I guessed were around 12 years old. The two adults passed and one of the girls. I waited for the second to pass, but it became apparent there was no second girl.

I wonder whether, in line with popular theories, the 'strangeness' of this particular stretch is because the area has a high water table and runs parallel with a railway line, a source of high voltage. Only a thought.

**Andrew Braeman**  
*Lancing, West Sussex*





# PECULIAR POSTCARDS



**JAN BONDESON** shares another deltiological discovery from his prodigious collection of postcards. This month's pictorial blast from the past presents an inventive postcard series imagining a watery version of the English capital

## 21. IF LONDON WERE VENICE



In 1905, at the height of the Edwardian postcard mania, Valentines of Dundee thought of a novel enterprise: why not take some postcards of traditional London landmarks and adapt them to show canals and gondolas, as if the metropolis had undergone a strange transformation into some Venetian rendezvous?

A correspondent to *Picture Postcard Monthly* of January 2006 has pointed out that there were six cards in all: Piccadilly, the Law Courts, Cheapside, Bank and Exchange, Trafalgar Square and Fleet Street. The Piccadilly card shows gondolas on their way round this famous landmark, and the Bank card has a policeman directing the busy nautical traffic from a platform. The 'If





London were Venice' cards are today quite scarce, but after 15 years of looking for them, I am pleased to announce that I have completed my collection.

One of the cards shows Fleet Street being navigated by gondolas. It was stamped and posted, presumably by a Welsh visitor to London, on 19 April 1905; he has helpfully pointed out to the wide-eyed recipient of the card back home in Swansea the positioning of St Paul's Cathedral amid the strange pseudo-Venetian scenery.

The series may have been inspired by an article in *The Harmsworth Magazine*, Aug 1899, "If London were like Venice", which included doctored photos that also imagined a partially submerged metropolis.



# READER INFO

## HOW TO SUBSCRIBE

ANNUAL SUB of 12 issues (inc p&p) UK £48; Europe £58; USA \$89.99 (\$161.98 for 24 issues); Rest of World £68. Please see house ads in the latest issue for details of special offers.

## NORTH AMERICA (US & CANADA)

Subscribers should contact: IMS, PO Box 866, Virginia Beach, VA 23451, USA. Telephone: 800-428-3003 (toll free) or order online at [www.imsnews.com](http://www.imsnews.com).

## UK, EUROPE & REST OF WORLD

Major credit cards accepted. Cheques or money orders should be in sterling, preferably drawn on a London bank and made payable to Dennis Publishing. Mail to: **Fortean Times**, Rockwood House, Perymount Road, Haywards Heath, West Sussex, RH16 3DH. NB: This address should be used for orders and subscriptions only.

Telephone payments and queries: 0330 333 9492.

E-mail payments and queries: [customer@forteanimes.com](mailto:customer@forteanimes.com).

## HOW TO SUBMIT

*Fortean Times* reserves all rights to reuse material submitted by FT readers and contributors in any medium or format.

## ILLUSTRATIONS

Contact the art director by email ([etienne@forteanimes.com](mailto:etienne@forteanimes.com)) before sending samples of work. We cannot guarantee to respond to unsolicited work, though every effort will be made to do so.

## ARTICLE SUBMISSIONS

Please send all submissions or ideas for articles to David Sutton, Editor, *Fortean Times* by email: [dsutton@forteanimes.com](mailto:dsutton@forteanimes.com). As we receive a large volume of submissions, a decision may not be immediate.

## LETTERS

Letters of comment or about experiences are welcome. Send to PO Box 1200, Whitstable, CT1 9RH, UK or email [sieveking@forteanimes.com](mailto:sieveking@forteanimes.com). We reserve the right to edit submissions.

## BOOKS, PERIODICALS AND REVIEW MATERIAL

Contact the reviews editor at: [dvarrett@forteanimes.com](mailto:dvarrett@forteanimes.com)

## CAVEAT

FT aims to present the widest range of interpretations to stimulate discussion and welcomes helpful criticism. The opinions of contributors are not necessarily those of the editors. FT can take no responsibility for submissions, but will take all reasonable care of material in its possession. Requests for return of material should be accompanied by a stamped addressed envelope or an International Reply Coupon.

We occasionally use material that has been placed in the public domain. It is not always possible to identify the copyright holder. If you claim credit for something we've published, we'll be pleased to make acknowledgement.

## CLIPSTERS WANTED!

Regular clipsters have provided the lifeblood of *Fortean Times* since it began in 1973. One of the delights for the editors is receiving packets of clips from Borneo or Brazil, Saudi Arabia or Siberia. We invite you to join in the fun and send in anything weird, from trade journals, local newspapers, extracts from obscure tomes, or library newspaper archives.

To minimise the time spent on preparing clippings for a Fort Sort, we ask that you cut them out and not fold them too small. Mark each clip (on the front, where possible) with the source, date and your name, so that we can credit you in the listing (right) when we use the material. For UK local and overseas clips, please give the town of publication. For foreign language clips, we appreciate brief translations. To avoid confusion over day and month, please write the date in this form: 1 OCTOBER 2021. If you send photocopies, copy on one side of the paper only.

Mail to: **Fortean Times, PO BOX 1200, WHITSTABLE, CT1 9RH**  
E-mail: [news@forteanimes.com](mailto:news@forteanimes.com)

# WHY FORTEAN?



**FORTEAN TIMES** is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874-1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of dogmatic scientific explanations, observing that some scientists tended to argue according to their personal beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity

in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term "teleportation", and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

Besides being a journal of record, FT is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox. FT toes no party line.

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENTS

**AUSTRALIA** Graham Cordon (SA), Tony Healy (ACT), John Palazzi (NSW), Len Watson (Qld). **CANADA** Brian Chapman (BC), Graham Conway (BC), **CYBERSPACE** Richard Alexander, John F Callahan, Hugh Henry, Steve Scanlon, Janet Wilson. **ENGLAND** Gail-Nina Anderson, Louise Bath, James Beckett, Claire Blamey, Peter Christie, Mat Coward, Kate Eccles, Paul Farthing, George Featherston, Paul Gallagher, Alan Gardiner, Keith George, Anne Hardwick, Richard Lowke, Alexis Lykiard, Diana Lyons, Dave Malin, Nick Maloret, Valerie Martin, Tom Ruffles, Meryl Santis, Paul Screeton, Gary Stocker, Roman Suchyj, Frank Thomas, Paul Thomas, Owen Whiteoak, Bobby Zodiac. **FRANCE** Michel Meurger. **GERMANY** Ulrich Magin. **HOLLAND** Robin Pascoe. **IRELAND** Andy Conlon, Pat Corcoran, Andrew Munro. **ISRAEL** Zvi Ron. **NEW ZEALAND** Peter Hassall. **ROMANIA** Iosif Boczor. **SCOTLAND** Roger Musson. **SWEDEN** Sven Rosén. **THAILAND** Terry W Colvin. **USA** Loren Coleman (ME), Jim Conlan (CT), Myron Hoyt (ME), Greg May (FL), Dolores Phelps (TX), Jim Riecken (NY), Joseph Trainor (MA), Jeffrey Vallance (CA), Gary Yates (UT). **WALES** Janet & Colin Bord.

## FORT SORTERS

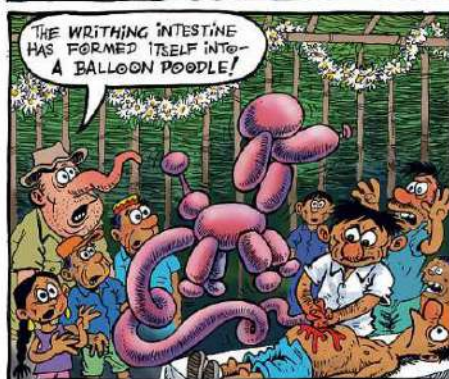
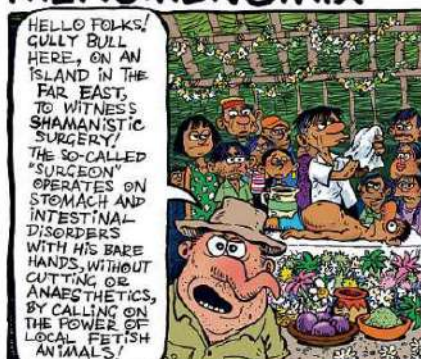
(who classify clippings placed in the Archives for Fortean Research)

Regular Fort Sorts are currently on lockdown hiatus – but please continue to send in your clippings to the new address: PO Box 1200, Whitstable, CT1 9RH

## CLIPPING CREDITS FOR FT411

Gerard Apps, Scott Barrie, David V Barrett, Louise Bath, James Beckett, Andy Conlon, Pat Corcoran, Liz Dobner, Brian Duffy, JD Evans, Alan Gardiner, Keith George, Benjamin Gleisser, Steve Griffiths, Anne Hardwick, Hugh Henry, Norma Hitchcock, Eric Jackson, Tony James, Rosalind Johnson, Dave Malin, Nick Maloret, Abigail Mason, Richard Muirhead, Alan Murdie, Tom Ruffles, Ryan Shirlow, Tony Smith, Gary Stocker, Brett Taylor, Frank Thomas, Paul Thomas, Chris Tye, Carol Tyrell, Clive Watson, Len Watson, Robert Whitaker-Sirignano, Owen Whiteoak, Janet Wilson, James Wright.







# COMING NEXT MONTH



## SKYJACKED

50 YEARS ON: CAN THE  
DB COOPER MYSTERY BE SOLVED?



## UNFATHOMABLE TALES

LEGENDS OF BOTTOMLESS  
LAKES AND HOLES



TALKING DUCK,  
EARTH VS SATURN,  
WANDERING STONES  
AND MUCH MORE...

**FORTEAN TIMES 412**

ON SALE 4 NOV 2021

BACKGROUND IMAGE: CASEY HORN/UNSPASH

# STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL



In Barranquilla, Colombia, a five-year-old girl died after a statue of the Sacred Heart of Jesus fell on her in a park. The girl was playing with her older brother in a square in La Colechera Park in the El Silencio district when she tried to hug the 150kg (330lb) statue, but it was not fixed in place and toppled over, trapping her underneath. Emergency services and neighbours freed the girl, but she died of traumatic brain injuries before reaching hospital. Rafael Vaca, a city councillor, said that the figure had been in the park for six months, but that no one knew how it had got there. *Metro; newsbeez.com, 2 June 2021.*

Iran Khorramdin, 74, and her husband Akbar, 81, were arrested in Tehran, Iran, for drugging, killing and dismembering their son Babak, 47, a noted film-maker and lecturer, after someone spotted body parts in a bin. Akbar confessed: "It was Friday night when his mother cooked chicken and poisoned it to make him unconscious, but he did not eat that and went to his room and slept, so we put the food in the refrigerator. He woke up the next day and ate that." They then tied him to a chair, stabbed him, dismembered the body and distributed parts round the city in three suitcases. When arrested they explained that they had killed their son because he was single and having relationships with his students and went on to confess that 10 years earlier they had killed their daughter Arezo because she was a drug addict, and their son-in-law because he was abusive. In court Akbar said: "I don't regret what I did with the cooperation of my wife. They were corrupted and I thank God." Police were looking into whether any other family members have gone missing in suspicious circumstances. *guardian.com, 21 May 2021.*

Pastor James Sakara of the Zion Church in Chadzia, Zambia, also a renowned traditional healer, decided to prove his credentials as a messenger from God to his followers by personally restaging the resurrection of Christ in the yard outside his church. Prophesying that he would rise from the dead again after three days, he had members of his congregation dig a shallow grave. With his hands tied in front of him and quoting Bible verses, Sakara was lowered into the grave and buried alive. Three days later, he was dug up, and, unsurprisingly, the 22-year-old

was found to be dead. Despite strenuous prayer and spiritual rituals aimed at resuscitating him, Sakara remained stubbornly deceased and when it became clear he was going to remain that way, two of the deacons who interred him fled while the third turned himself in to police. Critics suggested that the failure of his resurrection attempt might have been due to Jesus having been already dead when he was buried, whereas Sakara was still alive. *D.Mail, 24 Aug; ladbible.com, 25 Aug 2021.*

After software engineer John Gerrish, 45, and his partner Ellen Chung, 30, did not return from a hike in Sierra National Forest in northern California with their one-year-old daughter Miju and dog Oski, search teams found all of them dead on the trail in an area of the park known as Devil's Gulch. With no obvious cause of death, foul play was ruled out. "You come on scene and everyone is deceased. There's no bullet holes. No bottles of medicine, not one clue. It's a big mystery," said County Sheriff Jeremy Briesse. Police initially treated it as a hazmat incident but lifted the restrictions a day later, remaining baffled as to what could have killed the family and their dog. County Sheriff's spokeswoman Kristie Mitchell said: "We're not focusing on one specific cause at this point. There's just still so many that we can't rule out. We've looked at lightning strikes in the area. We've looked at storms... the weather, animals. We're looking at the entire area as a whole." Autopsies on the bodies did not reveal any obvious cause of death, but samples were sent for toxicology analysis, which can take some weeks. After considering potential carbon dioxide leaks from abandoned gold mines, suspicion has fallen on algal blooms in the nearby Merced River as a possible cause. These had previously led to the US Forest Service issuing warnings not to swim in the river or let pets drink from it. Some algae produce powerful neurotoxins that can kill humans, but normally it requires ingestion of the toxic algae or contaminated shellfish. Under rare circumstances algal toxins can become airborne and be inhaled, and if the landscape allowed these to concentrate in a hollow, they could have killed the family. Such toxins usually produce detectable nerve damage, though, and that should have shown up at autopsy. *BBC News; people.com, 21 Aug 2021.*

# OFFICIALLY THE MOST ETHICAL VITAMIN COMPANY



Always made with  
100% active ingredients.  
No binders. No fillers.  
No nasties.



## viridian

Available in local health food stores: [findahealthstore.com](http://findahealthstore.com)



Guaranteed  
Non-GMO



No Animal  
Testing



Palm Oil  
Free



Organic  
Certification



Eco  
Packaging



THE MULTI AWARD-WINNING PARANORMAL MAGAZINE

# HAUNTED

M A G A Z I N E

NEW  
WRITERS  
WELCOME

STOCKISTS  
REQUIRED

FREE  
REPRODUCTION  
UFO  
TODAY

THE AWARD WINNING PARANORMAL MAGAZINE

## HAUNTED

M A G A Z I N E

HANS HOLZER:  
THE ORIGINAL  
TV GHOST HUNTER

ARE YOU HAUNTED?  
BACK TO BASICS  
GHOST HUNTING

RICHARD ESTEP:  
FORT MIFFLIN  
THE GHOSTS THAT  
SAVED AMERICA

THE CURIOUS CASE OF  
THE BATTERSEA  
POLTERGEIST

WHAT REALLY HAPPENED AT 63 WYCLIFFE ROAD?

MIKE COVELL:  
UFOs OF  
YORKSHIRE

Also featuring:

Fairies, Forts, Flaps, Mines, Mounds, Hauntings,  
Haunts, (not so) Horrible Histories, Mysteries,  
Frights, Lights, Spooky Delights, News, Views,  
Interviews, Music, Books and of course UFOs...

NICK GROFF:  
THE RETURN OF THE  
DEATHWALKER

## HAUNTED

ISSUE  
27

FLYING OFF  
THE SHELVES  
John Rose continues why  
there are so few poltergeist  
bookshelves

PLAGUES,  
PANDEMICS & THE  
PARANORMAL  
Alan Crowl delivers the  
Yorkshire's deadly diseases

WAS EVP  
CREATED BY  
ACCIDENT?  
Sarah Thompson  
investigates

OLD SCHOOL  
GHOST  
HUNTING  
Harry Thompson  
the classic 'old school'

ISSUE  
29



SCAN ME

## ISSUE 30 OUT NOW!

VISIT [www.hauntedmagazineprintshop.com](http://www.hauntedmagazineprintshop.com)  
#DONTBENORMAL - BE PARANORMAL!

SUBSCRIPTIONS | BACK ISSUES | PRE-ORDERS

For a different kind of paranormal magazine.

